Ruth Fielding in the Far North

ALICE B. EMERSON

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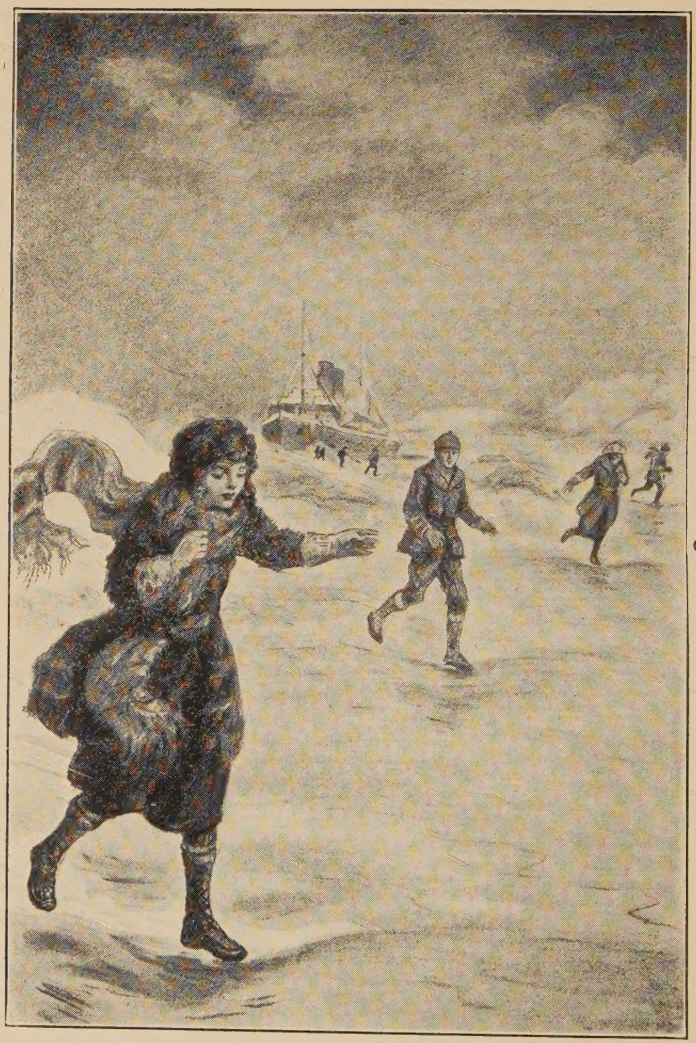

SWIFTLY THEY SPREAD OUT OVER THE ICE, KEEPING THEIR EYES STEADILY UPON THE SHORELINE.

Ruth Fielding in the Far North

OR

THE LOST MOTION PICTURE COMPANY

BY

ALICE B. EMERSON

AUTHOR OF "RUTH FIELDING OF THE RED MILL," "RUTH FIELDING TREASURE HUNTING," "BETTY GORDON SERIES," ETC.

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RUTH FIELDING IN THE FAR NORTH

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RUTH FIELDING IN THE FAR NORTH

CHAPTER I

THE DITCH

"I THINK this is just about the best chance you ever had, Ruth."

Tom Cameron spoke with enthusiasm, and the pretty girl beside him smiled dreamily. The latter had an open letter in her hand from which she had just been reading.

"I have always longed for the icy winds of the Far North," she said. "In that ice-bound country one may meet with real adventure."

"One can't very well help oneself," returned Tom Cameron, with a grin. "But after meeting with a polar bear or two, a simple cosmopolitan existence may appeal to you more strongly."

"Oh, but, Tom, it is not only the adventure I want! Don't you see?" Ruth Fielding leaned forward, laying an eager hand on his arm. "It is a wonderful chance to make the most magnificent picture ever filmed! That sounds conceited, I know," she added, with a little deprecatory

laugh. "But sometimes my enthusiasm runs away with me, Tom."

"Your enthusiasm is one of the greatest things about you, Ruth," asserted Tom, with fervor. "Enthusiasm coupled with a brain like yours is certainly a great combination. Pretty near unbeatable, I should say!"

"You will be spoiling me before you know it with such statements," said the girl, though she flushed with pleasure at this whole-souled praise. "If I should think myself as good as all that, the chances are I never would be able to make the kind of picture I want to."

"No fear that you will ever think too much of yourself," returned Tom, confidently. "The fact is, you are far too bound up in this career of yours to give yourself a thought."

"But it *is* a fine career, Tom," said Ruth, her eyes brightening, as they always did when she spoke of her beloved work. "And I can't begin to tell you how glad I am you have taken an interest in the picture making."

"Finest game in the world," the young man replied, enthusiastically. "Full of thrills and worth-while adventures and gambles—especially gambles, Ruth. I think I am a born gambler, for I sure do hate certainties."

"In that you remind me of Uncle Jabez," said Ruth, drolly. "You are so different."

Tom chuckled, appreciating the point of this, as any one must who knew Ruth's uncle, Jabez Potter. The old man who had grudgingly taken Ruth Fielding into his home some years before because there was nothing else for him to do, was exceedingly close with his money—some there were who called him miserly. To imagine Uncle Jabez risking a penny on anything not certain to make him a good return, was indeed funny.

"But about this proposition of Mr. Hammond's," said Ruth, folding the letter and putting it in her pocket. "If we accept and agree to start on his ship, we shall have to do some tall hustling to get ready."

"Then I am prepared to see the tall hustling," returned Tom, his eyes twinkling. "I can't imagine Ruth Fielding turning down a chance like this offer of Mr. Hammond's."

"Neither can I," returned the girl. Her brow furrowed with the concentration of thought. "Do you know, Tom, ever since I heard from Mr. Hammond about this trip up North, the plot of a story has been whirling around in my mind begging for expression."

"Then write it down, quick, before it gets away from you," was Tom's advice, and Ruth looked at him pityingly.

"Do you suppose I haven't done that?" she

asked him. "You do not know me very well, Tom, after all."

"You don't have to tell me that," answered the young man, ruefully, as he got up from the grassy knoll upon which he had been sprawling and began to tramp around in a circle, his hands thrust deep in his pockets. "You are as chock full of surprises for me, Ruth, as a kid's stocking is at Christmas time. I never know whether I am going to find a sweetmeat in the toe or a chunk of coal!"

Ruth laughed, but a little absently. She was thinking of her new scenario with an intensity that characterized all her work.

Mr. Hammond, with whom she had been connected in a business way ever since the beginning of her success in the moving picture world, had recently made her a proposition which strongly appealed to her.

It seemed that Mr. Hammond, who was president of the Alectrion Film Company, had chartered a vessel for the purpose of going to the ice-bound regions of the far North. The trip had been planned both for business and pleasure. Upon the ship would be several motion picture cameras and a group of men whose purpose it was to film scientific pictures of polar life. There would be a hunting party aboard also, made up of a group of Mr. Hammond's personal friends.

Knowing that Ruth had longed for some time to write a scenario whose scenes would be laid in the polar regions, the president of the Alectrion Film Company had suggested that here was the girl's opportunity. Why not, he had asked, write a big story and film it in its proper setting, transporting Ruth's company thither upon the ship that he had already chartered?

"Why not?" had said Mr. Hammond, and, "Why not?" had breathed Ruth in joyful echo. Could anything be more in accord with her desires or ambition? Here, indeed, might be the opportunity for producing the truly masterly film of which she had dreamed.

The story, or the essential part of it, she already had. And always, as the adventure took form and shape in her mind, new incidents occurred to her, incidents tremendous in their stark simplicity, soul-gripping in their presentation of primitive passions—a picture whose fame might spread from end to end of the great country they lived in.

"I don't believe you have heard a word of what I have been raving about!" Tom stood directly in front of her, frowning down at her with a puzzled expression on his pleasant face. Ruth smiled at him apologetically.

"You must forgive me, Tom. But really I can't think of very much beside the picture, just

now. The whole thing is too delightfully new to me. Here comes Aunt Alvirah. I wonder if there is anything wrong with Uncle Jabez."

Since the owner of the Red Mill had suffered a slight sunstroke while attempting to repair a spot on the roof of his barn, he had not seemed himself. Uncle Jabez had left the management of the Red Mill more and more to Ben, the hired man, and to "Aunt Alvirah Boggs," whom, many years before, he had taken from the poorhouse.

Now, as Aunt Alvirah came slowly toward them from the direction of the house, Ruth went to meet her, Tom following more slowly.

"Oh, my back! and, oh, my bones!" exclaimed the old woman, as she sank painfully upon a rustic bench, her gnarled hand clutching the cane which was her faithful companion. "I am getting old, my pretty, no two ways about it. Gettin' harder and harder to get about, so 'tis. Your Uncle Jabez—oh, my back! and, oh, my bones!"

"What about Uncle Jabez, dear?" Ruth prompted gently. There was a great bond of love between her and the old housekeeper, and Ruth watched the latter's increasing infirmity with anxiety. "Does he feel bad?"

"He worries, my pretty, about that spot in the road up yonder," said the old woman, pointing to a place beyond the Red Mill where the road

curved sharply. "In a heavy rain like we had last night, the bank washes away, and if a motor car should come around that curve it seems like it couldn't miss that ditch. Your uncle worries, my pretty, and Ben is in town where he can't git to fix it."

"You tell Uncle Jabez not to worry—we will fix it," Tom told her. "Hang out a red flag maybe. Come on, Ruth. Want to take a little walk and see how much damage has been done?"

Ruth assented, and they strolled over the grass toward the road, leaving Aunt Alvirah to follow them with misty old eyes.

"Here comes a car now," said Tom, as the purring of a motor reached his ears. Instinctively they hastened their steps. But they were too late. A car, driven rather recklessly around the curve of the road, tooted its horn blatantly.

With a sharp cry, Ruth ran forward.

"Look out for the ditch!" she shouted. "Look out!"

CHAPTER II

BAFFIN LAND

THE driver of the motor car realized the danger when it was too late. There was a shriek from the girl beside him, the shrill screaming of hastily applied brakes, and then a sudden, sickening smash.

"That is Chess's auto, and Helen is with him!" panted Ruth, as she and Tom ran wildly down the road in the direction of the wreck. "Tom, if they are killed I shall feel like a murderer! We should have put a red flag on the other side of that turn!"

It was like Ruth Fielding to blame herself for everything, even when no blame could possibly be attached to her. Even when, as a timid child of twelve, she had come to the Red Mill, orphaned and helpless, this generous characteristic had been apparent in her. Even Uncle Jabez Potter, who had at first taken her in "out of charity," had been gradually won by the sweet and sunny nature of the child.

As told in the first volume of this series, called "Ruth Fielding of the Red Mill," Ruth's first young friends in the neighborhood had been the Cameron twins, Helen and Tom, and through these two her life had opened into broader and more interesting channels.

With Helen, she had attended school at Briarwood Hall and had later gone to Ardmore College. During the World War, the chums had sailed for France, and had royally done their bit in the service of humanity.

But even before those days when America entered the war, Ruth had been keenly interested in moving pictures, and had had enough success in the writing of scenarios to urge her on to higher and finer effort.

Now, for some little time, she had not only been writing scripts for the pictures, but had been helping to direct them as well. Although, in connection with the Alectrion Film Corporation studio, she had succeeded in making a splendid picture with the Indian girl, Wonota, as her star, Ruth still cherished an ambition to head her own company and personally direct the filming of the pictures she wrote.

In the story "Ruth Fielding Treasure Hunting," the young author and director had realized her ambition. She had been able to organize her own company, and, though many obstacles had

risen in her path, the great venture had been a success.

During the filming of her picture, "Treasure Trove," on one of the Bahama islands, Ruth had found a treasure of her own—a Spanish chest filled with Spanish coins and precious stones, lost overboard from some old galleon sailing those waters in the days of piracy of many years ago.

It was at this time that Tom Cameron insisted that he took a serious interest in the motion picture industry and that he wished thenceforth to be a partner of Ruth's in her great undertakings.

Tom thought a great deal of Ruth, and to the girl there was nobody in the world quite like Helen's twin brother. Had the young man had his way, he and Ruth would have been openly engaged if not married. But Ruth's one ambition in life just now was to write and film the greatest motion picture ever produced, and, somehow, she felt she could not settle down until this was accomplished. So she staved poor Tom Cameron off, though thinking the world of the young man.

Now had come this offer from Mr. Hammond which gave to Ruth the chance she had been hoping for, to make her name one to be reckoned with among the motion picture producers of the country, to enlarge the reputation she had already made.

At that moment, however, as she hurried with Tom to the partially capsized car, Ruth was conscious only of a great anxiety as to the welfare of her friends.

Tom, who had reached the car before her, scrambled down into the ditch on the farther side of the wreck. Ruth could see no sign either of the unfortunate driver of the automobile or his companion.

Suddenly Tom uttered an ejaculation. Ruth saw him bend down and lift something that seemed to be partly under the car. He laid the bundle gently on the grass, and Ruth, reaching his side at that moment, saw that it was his sister Helen.

"Hello, old man. Give me a hand, will you? Something seems to be leaning rather heavily on my chest!"

From a quick inspection of Helen which showed that the girl was quietly breathing, though unconscious, Ruth turned to see Tom help Chess Copley from the wreckage of the car and steady him on his feet.

"That's all right, old chap," said Chessleigh Copley, wiping away the blood from a cut on his forehead. "I just got jolted up a bit. See to Helen, will you?"

But Ruth had already done that. She had loosened her friend's waist at the throat and had

been in the act of running for water to the brook which ran close to the roadside when Helen opened her eyes and looked vaguely about her. Then, with an effort, she sat up, Ruth's supporting arm behind her shoulders.

"Where is Chess? Did the car fall on him?" she asked, in anxiety.

For answer Chess knelt on the grass beside the girl he was engaged to and took her hand in his. But at sight of the blood on his face, Helen shrieked.

"So it did fall on you, after all!" she cried. "Is it bad, Chess? Some one help me up, do! Ruthie dear, what is the matter? You look as though you had seen a ghost."

"I was afraid I might," Ruth returned, rather shakily, as the two youths helped Helen to her feet. The sight of the accident had been a nerve-trying experience.

"It is a wonder either of you escaped with your lives," said Tom, as he eyed the battered car, unconsciously uttering Ruth's own thought. "You wouldn't think a ditch three feet deep would do so much damage."

"We were going too fast around the curve," admitted Chess, ruefully regarding the ruins of his car. "Helen was in such a hurry to get to the Red Mill and spring the glad tidings on Ruth that I forgot to be properly cautious."

"That is right, blame it all on a woman," retorted Helen, making a face at him. She had not been hurt, and had now recovered from the shock. "You were in just as big a hurry to get to the Red Mill as I was, Chess Copley, and you know it. Now, don't try to tell them any different."

"Children, don't quarrel," urged Ruth, pacifically. "I am only thankful that you got to the Red Mill alive. Come along, both of you, and rest. You must need it."

"But what am I going to do with the car?" objected Chess anxiously. "I can't leave the machine here."

"What do you expect to do, carry it on your back?" asked Helen, and Chess volunteered no reply to this impudent question. It was Tom who hastily intervened with a suggestion.

"I have my car in Ruth's barn, and after you have rested a bit I'll drive you in to Cheslow, if you say, and get some one to come out and get the car. It will need some fixing up before any one will go joy riding in it again, 'Lasses."

"But we must put some sort of warning on the other side of the road," said Ruth. "We must not leave this spot unprotected."

"Righto!" agreed Tom. "I will go back to the house, and with a paint brush fix a warning that can be seen a mile."

While he was gone, Chess Copley and the two girls stationed themselves near the treacherous turn in the road to warn other motorists who might come that way. It was only a short time before Tom returned with a red flag and a sign which he and Chess nailed to a tree by the roadside.

With a sigh of relief, Ruth and Helen turned back to the Red Mill. "Tom always fixes things up so nicely," thought Ruth, gratefully. "He is the most convenient person in the world to have around."

As a matter of fact, Ruth refused to think of a condition of things in which Tom would not always be at her elbow, ready and eager to help her over the rough spots in her path. But, though she thought so much of Tom, Ruth continually put off setting a time for a closer relationship between them. There was her career! She could never give up her work! It was impossible for her even to consider such a thing without consternation.

"To change the subject from a wrecked car to something more cheerful," Helen's merry voice was saying in her ear, "when are you planning to set sail with Mr. Hammond for Baffin Land?"

"Whenever Mr. Hammond wishes," replied Ruth. "He is the one who is engineering the

party. My part is to agree with his plans—or stay at home!"

"Which I see you doing!" gibed Helen, with a grin.

It was impossible for the chums to say more, for at that moment they were met by Uncle Jabez and Aunt Alvirah. The former was gesticulating and seemed in a tremendous rage about something, while Aunt Alvirah tried vainly to quiet him.

"I told that Ben to put a sign in the road afore he went to town this morning," cried the old man querulously, in reply to Ruth's question as to what ailed him. "He don't pay me no more attention than a flea. Next thing you know, some one will be suin' me for damages. You jest watch! That will be the next thing! I ain't got money to throw away!"

Ruth told him of the sign they had put up, and the old man seemed partly satisfied. He turned grumblingly toward the welcome shade of the old elm before the mill.

"Oh, my back! and, oh, my bones! Jabez' temper is gittin' worse and worse. I don't know what I will do with him. I don't indeed!" With this complaint Aunt Alvirah turned and followed the old man toward the house.

The young folks watched them go with rather

serious faces. Then Helen pulled Chess forward, confronting Ruth and Tom.

"We have the finest news to tell you two," she said. "You would never suspect it, Ruthie, but you are to have company on your travels into the frozen regions. Chess and I are going with you. Now don't argue. It is all settled."

CHAPTER III

BAD NEWS

RUTH, for her part, saw no reason to argue about the advisability of Chess and Helen accompanying her party on the voyage to the North. Since it was necessary for Tom to take the trip in the capacity of active partner in the Fielding Film Company, it seemed only natural and right that Helen, who loved adventure, should go along, too. For a long time Ruth and Helen had been accustomed to sharing their good times.

And as for Chess Copley, he was always good company and was heartily welcomed wherever he chose to go. However, Ruth guessed by the look of 'Lasses—so nicknamed during school-days because of his mop of taffy-colored hair—that more than mere desire for adventure was behind his determination to go with them.

"You are hiding something from us," Ruth accused him, laughingly. "Come, tell us why you really want to go North with the company."

"My uncle had some property left him up in

upper Canada some years ago," Chess explained. "It seems that the only people who know the truth about this property and whether uncle really owns it or not are a couple of old fur traders whose names I won't bother you by pronouncing. He never could get in touch with these men, and of course it was not worth his while to spend the money and the time to travel away up there to make sure of some property that might afterwards be found worthless. But when I found your party was headed in that direction, the brilliant thought occurred to me that I might kill two birds with one stone—"

"I hope you don't mean us," murmured Helen.

"And by combining business with pleasure," continued Chess, ignoring the interruption, "find out something that might be of real interest to my uncle."

"But what about Mr. Hammond?" asked Ruth. "It's really his expedition, you know."

"Oh, I fixed it with him, of course. He said he'd be glad to have us along," answered Chess. "I said I'd pay my share of the expenses, but he wouldn't listen to it—said I might give advice to the movie actors and so on," and Chess grinned cheerfully.

So it was arranged that both Chess and Helen should be of the party, and Ruth wasted little time in starting preparations for the trip.

As there were necessarily a great many matters to be attended to in the days that followed, Ruth ate little and slept less. Aunt Alvirah, who was already grieving at the prospect of another long separation from her "pretty," declared the girl would become a mere shadow if she continued to eat like a "spirit." But Ruth paid no heed to her. In fact, it was doubtful if she even heard her.

The scenario, which Ruth had temporarily named "Snowblind," was taking form and shape in her mind, and the girl worked feverishly over it. It was essential that the story be completed before the start, for, once embarked upon the adventure, Ruth knew there would be many important details to demand her attention.

She had wired the members of her company whom she proposed to take with her—and this selection alone demanded careful study. She had hoped to use Wonota in this picture also, but as the story progressed she was reluctantly forced to admit that the Indian maid did not fit into the scheme of things at all.

Ruth must have a white girl, and this fact troubled her considerably. Being a decidedly new company as yet and not financed as were the great film corporations, the Fielding Film Company could not afford to pay such salaries as were drawn by the stars of some concerns.

It was easy to think of half a dozen screen

celebrities who would fit the character of her heroine to perfection, but the mere thought of what it would cost her to procure one of these stars made her shudder.

It was necessary, then, to find some young, ambitious girl, beautiful and talented, who would play the part of Ruth's "Gloria" for a reasonable salary.

"Sounds easy!" said Ruth to herself, with a rueful smile. "But try to do it!"

She thought of the "extras" she had employed in the making of the two big pictures, "Bright-eyes" and "Treasure Trove," and, after eliminating all those who were impossible for the part, her mind came to rest on one girl, by name Anita Townsend.

This girl who, like a great many aspirants to fame in moving pictures, had come from a small town in the Middle West, had been picked up by Ruth from among a host of those refused work on the Alectrion lot. She was fair-haired and blue-eyed and beautifully formed, a wistful type of beauty that appealed to Ruth. Also, unless she was very much mistaken, the girl had brains.

Of course it was a gamble, putting a young and practically untried girl—Anita was just eighteen —in the leading rôle of a picture such as Ruth hoped to make. But, as Tom had said, the whole moving picture business was more or less of a

gamble. One had to have confidence in his judgment and then back that judgment to the limit of his ability, financially.

Ruth sat far into the night over this problem —and the result was a long night telegram to Anita, bidding her be present in Boston on the eighteenth of the month. Mr. Hammond had set the date of the start for the twentieth, so that Ruth would have two days to assemble her company and give them an idea of what was expected of them.

She would not take the Indian maid, Wonota, nor her father, Chief Totantora, but would give them a short vacation before setting them to work on a new picture, the story for which was already taking vague form in her mind.

Ann Hicks, an old school chum, wrote Ruth that she was in Boston visiting friends and with her was the former Jennie Stone, now Mrs. Henri Marchand, another chum. Ruth sent them word of the date of her arrival in that city, telling them that she intended to stay for a few days at the Hotel Craig and arranged for a party in her rooms on the evening of the nineteenth.

Helen was delighted over this arrangement, declaring that it would be as much fun as the trip itself to see Ann again and dear old Jennie Stone.

"I wonder if she has trained down any— Jennie Stone, I mean," said Helen, adding the

sage remark: "Frenchmen don't like fat women, as a rule."

"Then Jennie certainly did find the exception to the rule," Ruth said, laughing.

The day came when Ruth must say good-bye to the Red Mill and its two aged inmates. Her heart ached when she saw how feeble old Uncle Jabez looked and how wistfully Aunt Alvirah clung to her.

"I don't feel that I can stand many more of these partings, my pretty," said the old woman, wiping her eyes. "I have heard those that say partings are the next worse thing to death itself, and I do believe there is something in it, I do indeed. I wish you never had to go away and leave your old Aunt Alvirah any more, my pretty."

"Nonsense, dear," said Ruth, with forced cheerfulness. "I won't be away very long, you know, and think how much I shall have to tell you when I get back."

"But there is the time in between, my pretty," said the old woman, shaking her head. "And your Uncle Jabez feels your bein' away as much as I do, only he doesn't ever say a word. Seems like he is afraid it would kill him if he ever let anybody guess he was fond of 'em. Your Uncle Jabez, my pretty, isn't the same man he was even six months ago."

Ruth was well aware of that, and it was with a troubled heart that she finally left the two old people and drove away in Tom's car to pick up Chess and Helen.

They found the two impatiently waiting for them, although they had plenty of time to catch the train. When they reached the station, spurred on by Helen's impatience, they found there was more than fifteen minutes still to wait.

Then, at last, Boston, and Ann Hicks and Jennie Marchand waiting in the station to welcome them!

"Come to my arms, Ruthie; and you too, Helen, cherie," cried Jennie exuberantly, clasping both girls to her ample bosom. "I expected never again to see you in this life. Well, boys," she went on, turning to the grinning Tom and Chess, "you both look fit as fiddles. How's tricks?"

"Ripping!" replied Tom, adding, admiringly: "Jennie, you look great! Married life seems to agree with you, all right."

"Too, too well!" returned Jennie, mournfully. "Day by day in every way I get fatter and fatter. I do everything but drive a coal truck, too."

Thereupon she proceeded to engage the boys in a spirited conversation while Ann Hicks seized the opportunity to greet the two girls. Ann was determined that the latter should go with her and Jennie to the home of the friends they were

visiting. But Ruth protested that she must go directly to the Hotel Craig, where she had reserved rooms for herself and her company.

"Drat your old business anyway, Ruth Fielding!" said Ann, vehemently. "I declare, I am jealous of it. You never have any time to spend with your friends!"

However, Ruth was finally successful in breaking away from the two girls, and, after reiterating the invitation to her "party" on the following evening, took a taxicab with the two boys and Helen to her hotel.

Upon inquiry, she found that the members of her company had already arrived, which pleased her greatly. She went directly to her rooms and, by means of the house telephone, got in immediate touch with her "people," inviting them to her "party" and setting an earlier hour for a business meeting.

There was an excited quality in the voice of the girl, Anita, that Ruth understood well. Her eyes gleamed with pleasure at the thought of the moment when she would tell this young aspirant to fame that here was her chance to make good. But the next moment her face clouded. She did not dare think of the possibility that Anita would *not* make good!

The next morning Mr. Hammond called on her, bringing the welcome news that the ship, *Ice*

Bird, in which they were to explore the mystery and romance of the polar regions, was in fine condition and almost ready for the start.

Ruth outlined briefly the idea for her picture and was warmed by the producer's genuine enthusiasm.

"Sounds as if you had a big idea, Miss Ruth," he said, adding with a smile: "And I would trust you to swing it every time."

All afternoon Ruth worked at the "polishing" of her script, and before she was aware of it the hour at which the business meeting was to be held was upon her.

Tom, entering at her invitation the almost dusky sitting room, exclaimed at the folly of straining her eyes in such a light. Ruth smiled, and put away the script before disappearing into her dressing room to change her frock before the members of her company should arrive.

The first to claim admittance was Anita Townsend, and Ruth was struck again by the singular beauty of the girl. Her face was flushed, with excitement, probably, and her large violet eyes were luminous under dark lashes.

With a glance at Tom, Ruth drew the girl aside. Anita, breathless and eager, was the first to speak.

"Miss Fielding, why did you send for me? You want me to take part in your picture?"

"A very important part, Anita," said Ruth, smiling. "In fact, unless you object very much, you are to be my leading lady."

Anita's eager eyes dimmed suddenly. Her breath caught as she pressed Ruth's hand to her burning face.

"Oh, you are so good to me! I will do my best. I will!"

"That is all I ask of you, Anita," said Ruth gravely.

New members of the company arrived, eager to know what parts they were to have, and Ruth had no further chance for conversation with her new leading lady. But she was satisfied. Anita was beautiful, she screened admirably. And, more than that, the girl could feel. More than ever, she felt justified in her choice.

The business of the evening finally over, the real fun and merriment began. Ann and Jennie arrived in the midst of the jollification, and Jennie, at least, did nothing to check the gayety.

Ruth had made arrangements with the management of the hotel for a "bang-up" supper, as Tom expressed it, and the chef had done his best.

Ruth, seated at the head of the table which had been spread in her own sitting room, gazed happily and with a certain degree of pride at the merry company. She, Ruth Fielding, was their captain. This was her own company. These

people were working for the Fielding Film Company. It gave one a tremendous feeling of power, of purpose.

Jennie, asked for a speech, had just risen to propose a toast to their hostess, when the sharp ringing of the telephone bell interrupted her.

With a gay wave of her hand toward her friend, Ruth left the table and took the receiver from the hook. She listened for a moment. A look of dismay overspread her face. Then she turned to her guests, who had suddenly fallen silent.

"People, do you know what they have just told me?" she cried. "The *Ice Bird,* the boat we were to sail on, is on fire!"

CHAPTER IV

THE COLLISION

"THE *Ice Bird* on fire!"

The others echoed Ruth's announcement in startled whispers, while Ruth herself turned back to the telephone.

In short, staccato sentences she demanded to know the extent of the fire and the damage already done.

The people about the long table, so gay only a moment before, waited in a tense silence, watching Ruth anxiously.

The latter finally put up the telephone and turned to them. Her face was very grave. Thoughtfully and with a slow step, she returned to her place at the head of the table.

"This is a dreadful thing," she said, looking about at the serious faces turned to her. "And a most mysterious thing, as well. It was Mr. Hammond himself who called up. He said that the fire seemed to have originated first in the hold, but that the men on board, who have been closely

examined, disclaim any knowledge of how it started."

"Then that means we may be held up for nobody knows how long," cried Tom, with a frown.

"Bother!" exclaimed Helen petulantly. "Just when we were having such a good time, too! You might know that would happen."

"Well, I suppose Mr. Hammond didn't set the ship on fire for the purpose of spoiling our party," said Chess reasonably, and received only a frown from Helen in reply.

"I asked Mr. Hammond to keep in touch with me here," said Ruth quietly. "But I really feel as if I ought to be on the spot myself. I hate to break up our party—"

"Good gracious, Ruthie, you aren't breaking up any party," interrupted Jennie Marchand's hearty voice. "It is already broken into little pieces. Do you suppose we could sit here and laugh and make merry now, like Nero when Rome was burning? Not much! You run away to your poor old ship and we will take care of ourselves."

So that was the end of the party. Jennie and Ann Hicks left the hotel. Tom rushed Ruth off in a taxicab to the scene of the disaster, while the rest of the picture company stood about in little serious groups discussing the effect this unfortunate affair might have upon their future plans.

Finally they dispersed to their several rooms, leaving only Chess and Helen in Ruth's quarters. The latter had promised to wait there until Ruth's return to receive any messages Mr. Hammond might send.

Meanwhile, Tom and Ruth had reached the scene of the fire. They found a great crowd collecting and the police doing their best to preserve order. Several fire engines and a steam fire tug were already at work, trying to subdue the flames. Thick smoke was pouring from one of the hatchways.

"Oh, Tom, do you think they will put it out?" asked Ruth anxiously.

"Hope so. Seems to be more smoke than fire," the young man answered.

"They won't put that fire out," came from a man standing near by. He was addressing another man, evidently a sailor, and there was a sneer in his voice.

Ruth glanced around, and as the light of a street lamp fell on their faces the girl got a good look at the fellows. She did not like their looks at all, and almost unconsciously she pulled Tom to another spot.

The fire fighters continued to work with a will, and presently the report went around that the fire was under control.

"Oh, I hope the report is true," sighed the girl from the Red Mill.

"Guess it is," answered Tom. "Only a little smoke to be seen now. Wonder if we can hunt up Mr. Hammond?"

They hunted around, and a few minutes later fairly bumped into the gentleman they wished to see.

"It's all over," said Mr. Hammond. "Not near as bad as we expected at first. But it's queer how it started—can't make it out at all."

"How long shall we be delayed?" asked Ruth.

"Not more than a few days," was the reply.

Greatly reassured by this welcome news, Ruth and Tom returned to the hotel.

In the lobby Ruth turned to Tom irresolutely.

"I suppose you will think me foolish, Tom, but I am troubled about that fire—or rather, about its origin. I cannot help wondering if the whole thing really was an accident."

Tom looked at her, surprised.

"I don't know of anybody who has enough against us or against Mr. Hammond to do such a thing on purpose, do you?" he asked. As Ruth slowly shook her head, he added: "I think you are overtired to-night, Ruth. It has been a strenuous day, and you need a good night's rest."

Ruth was not sure but what this medicine was exactly what she needed, and yet, try as she

might, she could not rid her mind of an unpleasant suspicion. The whole incident, as Mr. Hammond had related it to her, seemed unusual, not to say mysterious. Again she asked herself the question which had occurred to her many times. Had the whole thing really been an accident?

However, as the repairing of the ship progressed with gratifying rapidity and the time of their departure again approached, Ruth gradually forgot her vague suspicions. All things seemed so normal and shipshape. Her company was in the best of spirits.

Then, on the morrow, they sailed.

The weather proved auspicious for the journey. A clearer, brighter morning could not have been asked for. The *Ice Bird* was a fine big vessel, built to weather the heaviest seas and the strongest gales.

Jennie and Ann Hicks, who accompanied the girls to the dock, were loud in admiration of the ship, and Jennie, at least, was equally vociferous in lamentation because she was not going along.

"It is enough to melt even your heart of stone, Ruth Fielding, to see such bitter disappointment in a tried and trusted friend," she said, almost tearfully, as she clasped Ruth to her in a fond farewell. "I wonder you can stand it."

"Dear me, you can come along if you like," remarked Helen, standing at Ruth's elbow and

taking in with huge enjoyment the bustle and excitement all about them. "I will give you the invitation if Ruth isn't polite enough."

"Oh, good gracious, no!" replied Heavy forcefully. "What do you suppose my precious Henri would do without his Jennie to remind him to wear overshoes on a rainy day? He is as helpless as an infant without me."

"There you are!" laughed Ruth. "A regular dog in the manger, Jennie, if ever I saw one."

Then it was over. Ann had said her goodbyes, as well as Jennie, the two girls had retreated to the dock. The *Ice Bird* moved down the harbor, the strip of water separating it from the dock grew steadily wider. They were off!

The first few days of the trip were uneventful. Except for an occasional small squall of wind, the weather was perfect and the *Ice Bird* plowed steadily on her course.

During this time Ruth held daily meetings of her company, making them familiar with the new picture, taking a few preliminary "shots," imbuing them with the spirit of the story, so that when the time came for the filming on land there would be no hitch in the work.

As made up for the trip, the Ruth Fielding Company, Inc., consisted of fifteen people. As mentioned before, her leading actress was Anita Townsend, and her leading man, A. Grand, who

was now billed under the rather fancy name of "Montgomery Grand." "Mother" Paisley, who had accompanied Ruth on many other tours, had thought this outing too strenuous, and so had remained behind, her place as chaperon being taken by a Mrs. Westwood, the wife of one of the actors, and Mrs. Johnson, the wife of the chief camera man.

Mr. Hooley, who in the past had managed many of the things which Tom was now taking care of, was not only general director under Ruth, but still insisted on having much to do with the camera work, he being an expert in that line.

Ruth, of course, had nothing to do in a business way with the scientific side of the expedition. The scientific party consisted of two very learned professors, one accompanied by his wife and the other by his sister, and two camera men, both experts in scientific works. Mr. Hammond's own party, which had come north solely for the purpose of enjoying an unusual outing and doing some hunting, was made up of four men, three of whom had no connection whatever with the moving picture industry.

As Ruth watched Anita Townsend, she became more and more certain of the soundness of her judgment in the choice of this girl for the leading part in her drama.

"I'm almost certain she will make good," she

confided to Tom. "She has a wonderful faculty for expressing all sorts of emotions in her face and by her actions."

"Oh, I knew you'd pick a winner, Ruth," answered the young man. Yet, when left to himself, Tom sometimes had his doubts. He knew that no matter how hard Ruth and the others might work, getting out a big picture was always a gamble.

During those first days on board the *Ice Bird* something of a shock came to Ruth. Walking along the deck one afternoon she found herself confronted by two men carrying coils of rope. One of the men was talking to the other, and the tone of his voice instantly attracted her attention. Then, to her surprise, she recognized the two sailors as the men she had noticed when watching the fire at the dock.

Evidently they were hands on board the ship. One was a short, stocky fellow with bulging forehead and outthrust jaw and with little eyes set like black beads on either side of a bulbous nose. The other was more commonplace in appearance, being of medium height and sandy complexion, but his eyes were shifty and furtive.

Instantly the mind of the girl from the Red Mill went back to that scene on the dock, and she remembered the words she had heard spoken. Evidently the short, stocky fellow had been

rather disappointed that the conflagration had not destroyed the *Ice Bird*. Now, here she found him on board as a seaman. What could it mean? Instinctively, she disliked both men, and her curiosity concerning them grew with the passing of the days.

Needless to say, Mr. Hammond had many rivals in the motion picture industry, and not all the rivalry was amicable. As the fame of the Alectrion Corporation increased, in no small part due to Ruth's successful connection with that firm, Mr. Hammond's competitors in the field had become more bitter. There had been *sub rosa* warfare going on for some time past, and for that reason Ruth would scarcely have been surprised at any unusual happening.

She half expected that the fire aboard the *Ice Bird* had been caused by some one of these rivals of Mr. Hammond, and now she wondered if Dawson and Noggs, the two seamen, had not been "planted" aboard the ship by persons unfriendly to her erstwhile manager and his plans.

She even went so far as to make guarded inquiries about the two men, and found, to her further disquiet, that they had been picked up at the last moment to take the place of two of the men who were sick.

She said nothing of her suspicions to Tom, for

she had no wish to worry him until there was something tangible to pin her anxiety to.

So taken up was Ruth with this and other problems that she did not notice just when she, and the others of her party, took to wearing warmer clothes.

But when the ice began to appear in the water and, later still, an iceberg loomed against the horizon, bearing down majestically upon them, Ruth realized that they were indeed approaching their destination.

One night when she had gone to her berth earlier than usual, wearied with an exciting day, Ruth suddenly awoke from a sound sleep and found herself staring wide-eyed into the blackness of her stateroom.

She listened, and heard without the porthole the scraping of ice against the sides of the ship as the *Ice Bird* plowed steadily onward.

Nothing alarming about that, Ruth told herself. One must expect ice-filled waters in the land to which they were venturing.

"Turn over and go to sleep and behave yourself, Ruth Fielding," she scolded herself. "It must be a long, long time till morning yet."

Still the scraping continued, and she could not sleep. Raising herself on her elbow to listen the better, she must have aroused Helen, who

was sharing the stateroom with her, for the latter hailed her in a sleepy tone.

"Stop rocking the boat, do," she grumbled. "Can't you let a fellow have a little rest? Ow, but I am sleepy!"

"But listen to that ice," said Ruth, in a half whisper. "It sounds rather ominous, doesn't it?"

The words were scarcely out of her mouth when there came a terrific crash and a sharp, rending sound. The vessel tilted crazily, then subsided, groaning in every shaken timber.

CHAPTER V

OVERBOARD

TREMBLING with excitement, teeth chattering with fear of they knew not what new peril, Ruth and Helen wrapped their heavy bathrobes about them and thrust their feet into slippers.

They had hardly done this when there came the sound of voices from without the door. A woman shrieked and another's voice rose shrilly as though in the grip of hysteria.

A double knock sounded imperatively upon the panels of Ruth's door, and she quickly opened it. Mr. Hammond, his face grave, stepped within the room.

"Is the ship sinking, Mr. Hammond?" asked Ruth, her voice sounding surprisingly calm to herself.

"No; and it is not going to either, this time," responded the other reassuringly. "The fault was that of the lookout, who failed to see the iceberg until it was fairly upon the ship."

"Oh, so it was that that jarred us," cried

Helen, recovering easily, as she always did, from the moment of trepidation. "It must have been some awfully husky iceberg to give us a jolt like that."

"It was," agreed Mr. Hammond grimly. "And it was just luck that we failed to hit the thing head on. We hit it slanting, which, of course, diminished the force of the contact. If it had been otherwise—"

"Seemed as if we tried to climb the side of it," said Ruth, with a nervous laugh. "It seems impossible that we could have a collision like that without causing some serious damage to the ship."

"Oh, it did rip something of a hole in her side," returned Mr. Hammond, with what Ruth thought to be almost assumed carelessness. "But the captain didn't seem to think it over-serious."

At that moment the door flew open and Tom and Chess dashed into the room. They showed signs of having dressed in a great hurry, and the manner of each betrayed considerable anxiety.

Having glanced at the girls and finding them calm and unhurt, they turned their attention to Mr. Hammond.

"That hole is larger than they thought at first glance," said Chess. "The water is seeping in more rapidly, and one of the sailors said he thought it was touch and go whether we could mend the leak in time to save the ship."

"What sailor was it who said that?" Ruth asked sharply, and Chess looked at her in surprise.

"Gobbs, I think, or Bobs, or some such name," he said, and was amazed at the look that spread over Ruth's face.

"It was Noggs," she murmured, as though speaking to herself. "I thought so!"

"Good gracious, Ruth, what is in a name, anyway?" asked Helen, a trifle sharply. She was cold and anxious, a combination that does not make for good nature. "This is no time to act mysteriously. I should think you would know that!"

Ruth did not answer, for Mr. Hammond and the two young fellows had turned toward the door.

"Where are you going?" she asked breathlessly, and Tom turned back to take her cold hand in a warm and reassuring clasp.

"Don't worry," he said. "Everything will be all right."

"But where are you going? What are you going to do?" Ruth repeated impatiently.

"Going up on deck to watch for more cute little death-dealing icebergs," returned Tom, with a rather grim humor.

"Then I am coming too!" she said, with de-

cision, nor could any persuasion on Tom's part cause her to change her mind.

He went out reluctantly then, and, left alone in the stateroom with Helen, Ruth hastily tore off her bathrobe and began pulling on her clothes.

"Wh-what are you going to do?" asked Helen, through chattering teeth.

"Go up on deck," returned Ruth shortly. "If we have to take to the boats I want to have plenty of warning so that I may rescue the cameras if possible."

Helen stared at her for a minute, then laughed shortly.

"Well, if that isn't just like you, Ruth Fielding," she said. "I do believe you would rather lose your own life than one of your precious cameras. I, for my part, intend to look out for Helen Cameron, thank you!"

They found their way up to the deck, which, considering that the cabins and companionways were considerably blocked by gesticulating and excited men and women, was no easy task, and there almost immediately encountered Tom and Chess.

The boys had good news for them. The rip in the ship's side had been hastily and temporarily plugged up, and the danger, for the present, was past.

"That may be all very well," remarked Helen,

straining her eyes to peer into the crackling blackness all about them. "But this part of the world is full of icebergs. What's to prevent another one from taking a piece out of our side?"

"The lookout, I hope," returned Chess, with a sad attempt at humor.

"Gee, that fellow must have had his eyes blindfolded this time, all right," said Tom, still referring to the lookout. "For all the credit due him, we might even now be sailing the wintry sea in open boats."

"It is a wintry sea!" said Ruth, gripping the rail and shivering as the icy wind bit at her viciously. "Listen to the crackling of that ice against the boat. Oh, Tom, what is that?"

Out of the gloom all about them, towering majestically toward the inky sky, a mountain of white appeared, drifting slowly along.

"Another iceberg!" breathed Tom. "And what a gigantic fellow."

"Magnificent!" murmured Ruth, trembling with excitement. "Oh, Tom, if it were only daylight and I could take a picture of that wonderful thing!"

"Did you ever see a girl like her?" Helen inquired of the world at large. "She would make a picture of a ravening lion just before the fatal spring and then take a chance that some one

would shoot the lion before it could get in its deadly work."

"Of course! Why not? Remember the tidal wave in the West Indies?" inquired Ruth calmly, then added with a chuckle that came strangely through her chattering teeth: "That was a dandy picture, and it very nearly saved my life, commercially."

Ruth referred to an incident in the making of her last picture, when a tidal wave had threatened to engulf a small island upon which they had temporarily found themselves. In the face of almost certain destruction, the camera men, at Ruth's instigation, had gone right on filming the magnificent spectacle. As a result Ruth had secured a picture unique in the making of films.

After a bit of desultory conversation the young folks, driven by the icy challenge of the wind, retired below decks. But, try as they might, they found sleep denied them for the remainder of that night. The sinister scraping of the ice against the sides of the boat, coupled with the memory of the collision with the berg, kept them awake and anxious until the rays of the sun gave them warning of another day.

And most of that day, Ruth, as well as the members of the scientific party aboard the ship, braved the bitter cold of the deck in the service of art and science.

The icebergs, rare and scattered at first, increased in number as the *Ice Bird* penetrated farther into the North, causing frequent deviations from the prescribed course of the vessel and redoubling the watchfulness of the lookout.

The cameras of the scientific party were almost always at work. But Ruth waited, waited patiently for the magnificent specimen of ice mountain she knew must eventually appear.

She did not get her picture that day, nor the next, but on the third.

Out from the vague and distant horizon, detaching itself from the misty background, wraith-like, mysterious and remote, floated a magnificent mountain of ice, the points and pinnacles of its jagged crest rising in gleaming spires of light toward the hazy sky.

"There is your picture, Ruth," cried Helen, from her place at the rail beside her chum. "If you don't get that while the getting is good, I will disown you forever!"

But already Ruth had left the rail and was issuing orders to her camera men. The cranking began, the giant berg, still remote in its grandeur, drifted by—and the picture was made.

"Gee, Ruth, that should be a beauty," said Tom, who had come to stand beside her. "You have an eye for the beautiful, sure enough."

"That is why she always liked you, Tommy-

boy," chuckled Helen, and the next moment the chuckle changed to a cry of consternation.

Straining to follow the fast-disappearing iceberg, Helen had leaned too far over the rail. The ship had veered sharply, and with a rush of sheer panic she had felt herself flung outward and down. Her desperately clutching hands closed on air.

CHAPTER VI

CAUGHT IN THE ICE

THE hideous thing happened so suddenly that the two who had witnessed it stood for a moment, paralyzed into immobility.

Then with a hoarse cry Tom tore at his overcoat.

"Girl overboard," he shouted. "Lower a lifeboat! I am going over!"

Chess Copley clutched at his arm, his face colorless. "Who is it, Tom? For heaven's sake, tell me!"

Tom gave him one look, then wrenched his arm away.

"Helen!"

Then, in a flash, while Ruth still stood dumbly by the rail, Tom mounted it, paused for a moment, measuring the dive, then flung himself out and downward.

"Tom!" she moaned.

Another swift picture, indelibly fixed upon her mind—and Chess had followed Tom, striking the water only a few seconds later.

Ruth covered her eyes with her hand, feeling horribly sick.

It seemed to her that if she were forced to look at those cruel, ice-choked waters for another moment she would go mad.

Vaguely she was aware that the screw had stopped turning. She heard raucous orders shouted, knew that a boat was being lowered. Suppose it were not in time!

She felt scalding tears against the fingers that were still pressed close against her eyes. The next moment a pair of soft arms encircled her and a girl's voice said:

"Don't feel so bad, Miss Fielding. They will be rescued, I am sure. Indeed I am! Please don't give way so!"

Ruth uncovered her eyes to find that the arms and voice belonged to Anita Townsend. In the eyes of the young star-in-the-making was a passionate sympathy and devotion that, even in that moment of horror, touched Ruth deeply.

She gently put the girl aside and with a great effort regained her self-possession.

"That is Mr. Hammond down there in the stern of the boat," she murmured, more to herself than to the girl who still stood anxiously by her side. "He will save them—if anybody will —if anybody can."

Her eyes sought the desolate stretch of water

and her heart leapt with hope. For there, some distance behind the *Ice Bird*—for the vessel had made considerable headway before her speed could be checked—were three tiny specks bobbing in the sea.

"Not two—three!" she cried aloud. "They have got her! Oh, Helen, Helen—" she went no further, for her treacherous voice broke and it required all her self-control to prevent another outburst of weeping.

The three tiny specks were moving slowly but steadily through the water in the direction of the lifeboat which had been hastily lowered and had gone out to meet them.

"They must hurry—hurry!" Ruth muttered fiercely, her hands gripping the rail. "How long do they think any one can survive in icy water like that?"

"They are hurrying, Miss Fielding. Don't you see?" cried Anita Townsend eagerly. "The boat has reached them. Look—they are being drawn from the water."

Ruth said nothing, but continued to stare stonily over the desolate waste of waters on the breast of which bobbed and tossed what seemed a pitifully inadequate small boat. It looked as if the ice must crush so tiny a prey before it could battle its way back to the side of the vessel.

But the perilous passage was made in safety,

and Ruth rushed forward while eager hands drew the half-drowned victims of the accident up upon the deck.

Tom and Chess could walk, though they were shivering and numb with cold, but Helen was unconscious and had to be carried with all haste to her berth.

The ship's physician prescribed for the two young fellows, ordering them to be wrapped in hot blankets and dosed with hot drinks.

Tom and Chess were led off protesting that they would not stand for any babying, and Ruth followed the doctor to her stateroom, where Helen still lay unconscious.

As the physician bent over her chum, Ruth longed to question him, but restrained herself. She was terrified lest Helen never open her eyes again. She looked so white and so very still, lying there.

For some time the doctor worked over the girl before his efforts were rewarded. Ruth, who was beside herself with anxiety, was the first to notice the first pink glow of returning color to the pale cheek, the first to notice the fluttering eyelids.

"Doctor, she is coming back! She is going to live!"

The tense sentences, uttered almost in a whisper, caused the doctor to glance up sharply, his

look softening as it rested for a moment upon Ruth's white face.

"You must not take this so hard, Miss Fielding," he cautioned. "First thing you know, you will be needing my services yourself."

No threat could have caused Ruth to pull herself together more quickly. She smiled upon the doctor calmly.

"I never felt better in my life, now that I am assured Helen will live," she told him, and with a hearty "Good enough!" the doctor turned back to his patient.

Helen revived swiftly after that. In an hour she was able to sit up in her berth, propped against pillows, and was already demanding that she be allowed to get up.

"It is not as though any bones were broken, Ruthie," she argued, when the latter strove to enforce the doctor's orders. "Remember, I am no cripple."

"I know, my dear, but you have had a dreadful experience and the shock to your nerves, I am afraid, will be—"

"Nerves—poof—I haven't any," interrupted Helen energetically. "How do you get that way, Ruth Fielding?"

Ruth did not deign to enlighten her but went on calmly to finish what she had started to say.

"If you were to try to stand on your feet, I

think you would realize just how weak you are."

"There is one easy way to prove that!" retorted Helen. "Behold!" And with an impetuous gesture she put aside the covers and got to her feet.

The next moment she would have sunk to the floor but for Ruth's arm about her.

"Don't say 'I told you so,' please, Ruthie," she begged, meekly allowing her chum to tuck the covers around her again. "I take back every thing I said about my nerves. I guess I must have them, after all."

"A fall like that was enough to make any one discover nerves," declared Ruth, with a reminiscent shudder. "Oh, Helen, if you care anything about my peace of mind, you will take care of yourself after this."

"I will try, but I don't suppose that will do any good," was the answer, with a sigh. "I need a nurse!"

Tom and Chess—who, by the way, had become very much the heroes of the hour aboard ship —were around the next day as though nothing had happened. But it was considerably longer than that before Helen was permitted to come up on deck.

And even when she did come at last, it was not to stay long. The bitter cold of the atmosphere and the dreary stretches of ice-filled water about

the ship seemed to depress her unduly and it was not long before she again retired to the welcome warmth of the cabin.

But for Ruth, the deck held a tremendous fascination. Clad in fur from head to toe, she was always eagerly on the lookout for some unusual spectacle that would give an excuse for a picture. The camera men were always at hand, and Ruth added more than one precious film to her store.

They were many hundreds of miles from home —from the old Red Mill—but Ruth had not forgotten Uncle Jabez and old Aunt Alvirah. Often when alone she thought of them and wondered how they were faring.

"Perhaps Uncle Jabez is worse," she said to herself, more than once. "And poor old Aunt Alvirah too. Maybe I should have remained closer at hand, to be with them when they needed me. Out here, in this land of ice, I seem to be very far away!" And the girl from the Red Mill heaved a sigh.

Came a day when the captain announced pridefully that if their luck held out for another twenty-four hours they would reach their destination.

"Land!" Ruth said to herself. "And then— my picture! The biggest work I have ever done yet!"

It was that same night that Ruth awakened. Unable to tell what had awakened her, she lay still in her berth, listening.

Then suddenly she knew. The *Ice Bird* had stopped!

CHAPTER VII

RUBBER ICE

For a few moments Ruth continued to lie motionless, striving to analyze this phenomenon.

They could not have reached shore. Captain Humphreys had said that with their luck running high they could not hope to reach harbor before noon of the following day.

And their luck had not been running high. Far from it! Because of the increasing number of sluggish ice floes blocking the water, their progress had been retarded. At times they had almost been forced to a standstill.

Then toward evening, the intense cold had seemed to break. Captain Humphreys had appeared optimistic again, had even said that if this proved indeed to be the breaking of the unusually severe cold spell, they might regain the ground they had lost and still reach land by noon of the next day.

At this point in her musings Ruth suddenly checked herself. She realized that the cold had

not mitigated so much as they had hoped it would. Even the stout hull of the sturdy *Ice Bird* could not keep out entirely the bitter, menacing cold of that fierce north wind.

Another few moments of staring into the darkness, and Ruth became aware of a curious, cracking sound, not the scraping of ice against the boat, but a new, insidious sound.

She had read once of a steamer that had been caught in the ice. The tremendous force of the floes had closed upon the ship, cracking and crushing her beams, much as a cat crushes the bones of a helpless mouse.

With an effort, Ruth fought off these premonitions of disaster. She was probably making herself a good deal of trouble about nothing. Probably there was some small thing wrong with the engine of the ship. They would be moving again presently.

And still that groaning, cracking sound!

Unable to lie quietly, Ruth softly flung back the bedclothes and, as silently, began to dress. She had hoped not to awaken Helen, but a sleepy voice, sounding strangely loud in the silence, told her that, in this attempt, she had been unsuccessful.

"Ruth, is that you?" asked Helen, adding, without waiting for an answer: "Ruth, what makes it so still? Why are we not moving?"

"I don't know—some engine trouble, I suppose," responded Ruth, in a tone she strove to make light. "I thought I would go and find out."

"Wait a minute. I am coming with you."

Helen's voice, like that of Ruth, was forcedly light, but neither girl deceived the other. In complete silence they finished dressing.

Ruth opened the door softly and they made their way forward, still not speaking.

In the cabin they encountered the captain, Mr. Hammond, Tom, and one or two others. The men were gathered close together, and they were conversing in undertones. But it needed only a glance in their direction to assure the girls that the subject under discussion was a serious one.

The men seemed surprised and embarrassed at sight of the girls, and a look passed round the little group that told Ruth as plainly as words would have done that she and Helen were not to be given their confidence. Accordingly, with her usual fearlessness, Ruth went right to the point.

"We want to know exactly what has happened and we shall really worry a good deal less if you tell us the truth than if you try to shield us," she said, and the men exchanged another and a rather sheepish glance.

It was Tom who suddenly championed Ruth's cause.

"You can tell Miss Fielding and my sister any-

thing, gentlemen," he said. "They have as much courage as we have, and, at any rate, in the morning they would be forced to know the truth."

Ruth shot him a grateful glance as Mr. Hammond, evidently deciding that Tom was right, began to speak.

"We are caught in the ice, young ladies," he said. "I think Captain Humphreys will agree with me that we are pretty tightly caught."

"Wedged in as tight as a button," agreed the captain, with a shake of his head.

"What does that mean?" asked Ruth, in a low tone. "Is there any danger from our position, or does it just mean that we must suffer a regrettable delay?"

Again there was a pause but, after receiving an almost imperceptible nod from Mr. Hammond, the captain continued frankly.

"I am afraid it means a little of both, Miss Fielding. Of course a great deal, a very great deal, depends upon the weather. If we should have a warm spell, the ice would break in a day or two sufficiently for us to make our way into harbor. But if the cold continues, as I must say, from present indications, it shows every intention of doing, then—" he paused and shrugged his shoulders. This time it was Helen who was persistent.

"And what then, Captain Humphreys?" she asked.

"Then there is danger of the ship being forced out of the water or, a still more unpleasant alternative, crushed by the pressure of the ice."

"Not particularly a pleasant prospect," said Helen, with a little laugh, adding, hopefully: "I don't suppose there is any chance of our being able to walk ashore, is there?"

The captain shook his head doubtfully while the entire party waited, obviously eager, for his reply.

"That is, at the best, a risky business," he said. "Ice that seems absolutely sound when first ventured out upon is sometimes insidiously deceptive. The ice might not be frozen solid all the way to shore; yet, once started, it is a dangerous business to turn back."

"Couldn't one of us fellows make the attempt first and report to the rest?" asked Tom. "A sort of try-it-on-the-dog idea, you know," he added, with a grin.

But once more the captain shook his head.

"It is too far to shore for one to go and come back," he explained. "It would be possible to determine the going for a short distance from the ship, however," he added.

As it was generally agreed that nothing further could be done about their predicament, for that night, at least, the little company disbanded,

looking for all the world like a group of conspirators as they sought their quiet cabins.

It was this deadly, unearthly stillness that prevented slumber. Ruth and Helen talked in whispers until the first gray of dawn stole through the portholes. Then they slept.

In the morning what a spectacle greeted their weary eyes! On every side of them ice gleamed dazzlingly in the Northern sun. And the *Ice Bird,* the throbbing of her engines stilled, held helpless captive in this appalling white sea!

The passengers and crew of the vessel stared, awed and silent, upon the phenomenon, unable to comprehend fully, just then, the peril of their position.

Several days later, as the bitter weather showed no sign of breaking, Captain Humphreys issued an ultimatum.

"Unless the cold moderates swiftly, the *Ice Bird* will not last another day," he told them soberly. "Her seams are already opening. In my judgment, the safest course would be for all of you to take to the ice and trust that it will bear you safely to shore."

"And what of yourself, Captain?" asked Chess Copley softly. "And the crew?"

The captain drew himself up proudly.

"I am master of this vessel," he said simply. "I stay with the ship."

It seemed ages later, yet it was only a matter of hours, when Ruth, her hand in Tom's, stood on the ragged surface of the ice, staring numbly shoreward. A short distance from them Helen and Chess stood close together.

"It seems a dreadfully long way off, Tom—the shore," whispered Ruth, and Tom's grip upon her hand tightened.

"It will be all right, Ruth," he said. "Just hold tight to me—"

"And we will sink or swim together," finished Ruth, with an uneven, jerky, little laugh.

"The main thing is that we shall be together," Tom said, and Ruth wondered as she had often wondered in the past how she could get along without Tom. She was more than ever thankful that she had him with her at this moment.

One of the ship's crew had gone out upon the ice to test the nature of it, and they were waiting for his return. Ruth was the first to see him coming.

The man, Roland by name, the second mate of the *Ice Bird* and a rugged, good-natured fellow, reported good news to them.

"It is pretty rough going, ice hills in plenty," he said. "But the footing is solid. It is safest for us all to keep together and go slow. If I tell you to stop, don't attempt to go on. You never can tell about ice. Every one ready?"

They started slowly, feeling their way over the jagged surface of the ice, sometimes forced to climb miniature mountains of ice.

"If we only could have brought the cameras with us," said Ruth, as they paused for a momentary respite. "It was like cutting off my right hand to leave them behind, Tom."

Then their guide urged them on again, saying that they must make the best possible use of the daylight.

For what seemed an eternity to them they struggled on again, only to be halted a second time by Roland, the second mate. Questioned, his gravity increased and he swept a hand out toward the stretch of ice that still separated them from shore.

"I don't know—I can't tell for certain till I've tried it," he said slowly, "but that ice out there looks to me like rubber ice."

CHAPTER VIII

HOSPITALITY

When Mr. Roland spoke of rubber ice, the group of shivering castaways gazed at him in puzzled wonder. It was evident that no one had heard of this arctic phenomenon before, but all were prepared to believe that it boded ill for them.

Mr. Hammond was the first to speak.

"Just what is rubber ice, if I may ask?"

"Exactly what its name implies," returned the mate gravely. "The crust of the ice is frozen, but not sufficiently so to bear your weight without yielding—"

"That sounds pleasant!" cried Helen, in a tone not quite as flippant as she tried to make it. "If this rubber ice, as you call it, extends all the way to shore, then I—"

"I said it would not bear your weight without yielding," interrupted Roland, with a swift frown at the levity in the girl's voice. "But sometimes it can be crossed in safety."

"We can only hope this is one of the times," said Ruth, with forced cheerfulness.

"Wouldn't be possible to get back to the ship, I suppose?" hazarded Tom, but Roland shook his head.

"I think we have a better chance if we keep on the way we are heading," he replied.

"If we got back to the ship and she was crushed in the ice, we'd be done for," said one of the moving picture actors.

"I'd rather try for shore," cried another. "Me for land, every time!"

"Then suppose we get started," suggested one of the members of the scientific party. "This cold is getting worse by the minute, and it is easy to see that the ladies are almost exhausted."

"We must spread out over the ice," said Roland, speaking quickly. "There must be at least a hundred feet between every person. Ice that will hold one will bend and break under extra weight."

The girls of Ruth's company cried out in fright at this, and even Ruth and Helen exchanged anxious glances. There was always comfort, if not added safety, in numbers, and to face this peril alone, magnified it out of all proportion.

Tom's hand gripped hard upon Ruth's and, looking up, she saw that his eyes were smiling and steady.

"It is only a short distance to shore and I don't think there is so much danger from this rubber ice as Roland intimates," he said, cheerfully. "Just keep up your pluck as you always do and keep on going. That ought to turn the trick."

"I was not thinking of myself, Tom—but of you," said Ruth softly, and the look that flashed into his eyes startled her for the moment.

Then Roland's voice came to them, urging, commanding, and they knew that the test was about to begin.

Swiftly they spread out over the ice, keeping their eyes steadily upon the shoreline, Roland's last words ringing in their ears.

"If you hear any one go through, don't look. You can't help. Just keep right on."

"Don't look—you can't help," Ruth repeated dumbly over and over to herself as she took a tentative step upon the treacherous ice. "Oh, Tom, how could I bear it if—"

But she did not finish the sentence. Resolutely she put all the power of her will into the determination to reach the shore.

Nightmare! Elastic ice, yielding beneath one's feet as yields a feather bed, threatening each moment to break and let one through to certain death in the icy waters beneath that frozen crust, yet not breaking! Sinking with

each step so that one had the impression of continually climbing! Listening always for the horrible splash that would mean some one had "broken through!"

In the years that followed, Ruth never forgot that hour. Many a night she was to wake up shuddering—to the exquisite relief of finding herself safe and warm in bed.

Countless ages of numbed effort, of prayers muttered brokenly through lips that were cracked and blue with the cold! Then the shore and safety and the blinding, incredible news that no one had broken through, that all had safely reached firm ground!

It was necessary to rest for a period, for the exhaustion and the reaction from so terrible an ordeal had nearly prostrated some of the younger members of the party.

Ruth, recovering first, became very anxious about Anita.

The girl, never strong physically, had collapsed, and Ruth saw that unless they speedily found protection from the bitter cold, truly serious consequences might ensue.

Fortunately for all of them and for Anita in particular, the second mate was familiar with that part of the country. Having sailed the "frozen seas" for many years, there were few places in the arctic in which he was not at home.

"Not far from here are the cabins of two trappers—very good friends of mine," he told them, pointing inland. "If we can get as far as the shacks of Pierre and Anton we'll be safe."

"Suppose they are not at home?" suggested Helen, through chattering teeth.

"That makes no difference. My friends never fail to leave their cabins well stocked with provisions and firewood. But at this time of year I have no doubt we'll meet them in person."

Then began the real test, for the crossing of the rubber ice had sapped the strength of all the party and they had need to call on that mysterious reserve power that comes when one thinks the supply of strength and endurance has been exhausted.

Somehow, they made that journey to the cabins of the fur traders. Blinded, stumbling, miserable beyond words, they kept on, encouraged by Ruth and the men of the party. Finally they came upon a lighted window.

It was a queer thing, that window. It seemed to rise up and hit one in the face without giving any preliminary warning of its presence. The reason for this, as the girls later found, was that the cabin of Anton Delabarre was situated at the foot of a steep bank of drifted snow, and one could almost step upon the roof of it before becoming aware of its existence.

"Warmth!" cried Helen, as she put an arm about Ruth and they slid and stumbled down the steep embankment. "Ruth, they have a fire in there, and I believe I smell something to eat!"

"Stew—beef stew with onions!" agreed Ruth, and was amazed that the stiffened muscles of her face would not permit a smile.

A hard double knock upon the door, a swift rush of light and warmth, the delicious odor of cooking, and they jammed within the domain of Anton Delabarre.

They made, half-frozen as they were, a rush for the fire that crackled in a stove at one end of the large room, but a big form barred the way, shoving them gently, but firmly, back.

"Not so queek, not so queek!" urged a deep and musical voice. "You must use ze ice, first tam, is it not so? Fingers that is so near freeze mus' be thaw' with gentleness—so!"

Beside a large cot, a stove, a long table and a few rough chairs, the room was bare of furnishing and ornament, but, after the hardship they had endured, the room seemed like a palace to the party from the *Ice Bird*.

And they could not have wished a more courteous or solicitous host than Anton Delabarre. A big man—at whose age it was impossible to guess, for he belonged to that group of fortunate mortals who seem ageless—rugged of phy-

sique and gentle-eyed, the Frenchman appeared to dominate that simple cabin, yet fitted into the surroundings as neatly as a sail fits into the rigging of a yacht.

He fed the castaways on stew and hard biscuits until they were forced to call a halt for digestion's sake. But never to the most elaborate dinner had they brought the zest of appetite that they brought to that simple meal.

Afterwards some of the party repaired to the cabin of Pierre Briais. It was only a few yards away, but all the women from the *Ice Bird*, and some of the men as well, stayed with Delabarre.

They learned that the cabin boasted another room, larger than the combination living room, dining room and kitchen, to which they had first been introduced. In this room, beside some skins hung on the walls and a chair or two, were four cots. Delabarre offered to transfer the fifth cot into this room, also. This done, the womenfolks of the party, at least, would have fairly comfortable sleeping quarters.

As for the men, they declared themselves quite content to roll themselves in skins, of which the Frenchman had a great number, and sleep near the warmth of the kitchen stove.

Anita Townsend had revived rapidly since the dinner of stew and biscuit. Ruth was immensely

relieved to see the color come back to her face and the old-time sparkle to her eyes.

Amenable to the unspoken rule of the open spaces, Delabarre did not inquire into their reasons for asking his hospitality. But when the second mate, Roland, himself volunteered the information, the Frenchman seemed considerably interested.

"That is tough luck, that, eh?" he said sympathetically. "Zat rubber ice iss no good for floor. I have try heem myself, one tam. To-morrow that ice, she thaw. You wait and see!"

Ruth looked at him sharply.

"Does that mean you think the cold will break?" she asked breathlessly.

Delabarre regarded her, his kindly, quizzical eyes crinkled at the corners.

"To-morrow your ship will be free like ze air. Delabarre, he know that much. You wait!"

CHAPTER IX

CONSPIRACY

THE Frenchman's prophecy in regard to the ending of the unusually bitter spell of weather proved uncannily correct.

Venturing forth into the ice-covered world the next day, their courage, reënforced by an excellent hot breakfast, again cooked and served by Delabarre, Ruth and Helen, accompanied by Tom and Chess, retraveled the path they had made the night before, stopping where the fringe of rubber ice encroached upon the shore.

They could detect no change in the temperature, but surely the ice did not look the same. Near the shore it seemed almost transparent and there was a thin coating of water upon it.

With the aid of glasses Tom could see that the ice further out was beginning to crack.

"The one chance that Captain Humphreys was afraid to have us take, has turned out right, after all," marveled Helen.

"I think our friend Delabarre was a bit op-

timistic," said Chess. "He said the *Ice Bird* would be free of the ice by to-day, but I will consider her lucky if she is able to make port by to-morrow."

"And that, only if the weather holds," Tom reminded him.

"And if it does not, that means the end of everything," said Ruth, as though speaking her thought aloud.

"It means the end of Captain Humphreys and his crew, that one thing is certain."

"Not certain by any means," said Tom quickly, as he caught Ruth's look of distress. "In any case, Humphreys and his men could follow our example and take the ice route to shore."

"Always provided the ice holds," agreed Chess.

"And my picture, think of that!" said Ruth in a strained, hard tone that spoke of her mental tension. "I suppose you all consider I am selfish to think of business at a time like this when men's lives may be at stake. But it is more than business. The making of my picture would have been the realization of a dream—"

"Dear me, listen to the girl! She speaks as if all hope were lost," interrupted Helen vigorously. "Did we neglect to tell you, Ruthie, that the packed ice is disintegrating and that the *Ice Bird* will soon be as free as air? If you don't

believe me, go ask our good friend, Delabarre!"

But for all their good-natured gibes, Anton Delabarre proved an excellent prophet. There was no return of the terrific cold which had imprisoned the *Ice Bird,* and by noon of the following day the vessel had safely reached harbor.

Mr. Hammond and his party, Ruth and hers, all of whom had followed the progress of the ship with the intensest interest, swarmed aboard to greet Captain Humphreys and congratulate him on his safe arrival.

He, in his turn, was overjoyed to find them safe and well, and bitterly reproached himself for the error of judgment that might have cost the life of one or more of his passengers.

Tom and Chess planned to return to the cabin of Anton Delabarre for the purpose of thanking the trader for his kindness to them. When she heard of their purpose, Ruth insisted upon accompanying them.

"But it is a long hike," protested Tom. "And after the excitement we thought you girls might like to rest."

"Rest! Do I look like it?" Ruth flung back, and Tom was forced to admit that her glowing face and eager eyes did not register fatigue.

"I want to see Delabarre and his friend Pierre Briais, Tom," she went on to explain swiftly. "The truth is, I have been worried about the

portrayal of the two old fur traders in my picture. Tracy and Jameson," mentioning two men in her company, "are usually very clever in character parts, but somehow I don't think they are going to play my French trappers with any great success."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Tom, beginning to see light. "Do you mean you are going to ask those two to act in your picture?"

"Of course. Why not?" Ruth returned briskly, adding, with an excited laugh: "Don't stand there staring at me like a loon, Tom Cameron. There is a great deal to be done before dark!"

"So it seems," said Tom, adding, as he looked admiringly at Ruth's eager face: "You are a wonder, Ruth, truly! I have to take off my hat to you!"

As they were preparing to leave the ship, Ruth unexpectedly came face to face with the sailor, Noggs. The man, also taken by surprise, gave her a swift and stealthy glance that chilled her blood.

In the excitement and anxiety of the past few days she had almost forgotten the man, had tried, when memory of him and his crony did occur to her, to persuade herself that she had been mistaken regarding their characters.

But this encounter swiftly revived all her

doubts and misgivings. For some reason that she could not fathom, the man was surely an enemy.

She said nothing of her fears to Tom and, indeed, on the long hike over the snow to the cabins of Delabarre and Briais, strove to put the incident out of her thoughts.

The interview with the old fur traders was more successful than she had dared to hope it would be. The two, who had lived so many years in the wilds, were as delighted as children at the chance to act before a motion picture camera.

She sketched out a part of her story for them, especially those scenes in which they were to take prominent parts, and as her enthusiasm and vehemence rushed them on toward the conclusion of the drama, both Delabarre and Briais were visibly affected.

It was, in fact, the type of story most likely to appeal to them. In it the heroine, a pretty, tenderly nurtured society girl, meets a trader from the rugged North.

The result is a case of love at first sight and the girl agrees to marry her lover before she realizes what a change in her mode of living marriage with him would mean. There follows the blasting of their romance. The trader re-

turns to his beloved North and the girl is left to heartache and disillusionment.

However, urged on by longing for the man she loves, Gloria—the girl heroine—defies conventions and the vehement protests of her family, and follows her lover.

On her journey she meets with hardships she did not know existed. (These pictures on shipboard, Ruth had already taken to her satisfaction). But it is only after she disembarks in the land of ice and snow that the girl begins to face real hardship.

She finds her lover at last, alone in his cabin and desperately ill of a fever. In striving to bring help to him, the girl ventures from the cabin. Through the delirious ravings of her lover she has learned that two fur traders live in a shack not far away and her one hope is to reach them.

On the way she becomes confused and finally realizes that she is hopelessly lost. Dazzled by the brilliance of the sun on the ice, she becomes snowblind. A storm comes up, the snow falls thickly, and still she fights her way onward.

Stumbling at last against a hard object, she finds it to be the door of a cabin. She calls out weakly and falls to her knees in the snow.

Right here was where Anton and Pierre were to come in, for it is their part to rescue the girl,

to coax her back to life, and, in the end, to succor her lover.

"But what ees the end, please, Miss Fielding?" queried Pierre Briais, with his almost childish eagerness. "I and my frien' here are much interest' to know."

"The lover is so grateful to the girl when he learns all she has done for him," continued Ruth, not at all loth to impart the climax of her story to these two satisfactory listeners, "that he will give up his life in the Northern country—the only life he has ever known or been fitted for—and follow her to the States. But the girl will not have it so. The lure of the open, wild spaces has cast a spell upon her, and she knows, beside, that her 'Bob' would be completely miserable were she to take him out of his element."

"So she stays wit dat fellow," Anton Delabarre commented approvingly, as he knocked the ashes from his pipe into the glowing coals of the fire. "She t'ink right dat tam, fo' sure. I was hope all tam you end like dat!"

Aglow with the success of her mission and the whole-souled praise of these two simple sons of the open spaces, Ruth, with Chess and Tom, left the cabin of Anton Delabarre a short time later and started toward the ship.

They were bitterly cold by the time they

reached it and glad enough to scurry to the welcome warmth of the ship's cabin.

It was some hours later that Ruth, stealing up to the deck for a breath of the freezing air before turning in for the night, came upon a discovery that shocked her profoundly.

Helen was already curled up, sound asleep in her berth. The boys, Chess and Tom, thought that Ruth also had retired. Thus the need for her caution in tiptoeing up to the deck, lest one of them see her and think it his duty—or pleasure—to accompany her.

And Ruth wanted to be alone—alone to think over her plans for the following day, which was to be one crowded full of work and adventure.

She made her way to the rail, staring out into the desolate night with eyes that were blinded by something more than the darkness. Ambition! She would make her picture, her great picture, and to-morrow the real work would begin!

She would go ashore to find the proper background for the filming of her first shots. Everything was ready, everything auspicious. She could not fail!

But she must compose her mind. There were details to be thought out. Little changes must be made in her scenario that she could see plainly, now that she was on the spot. And her plans

must be perfect; there must be nothing left to chance nor changes made at the last moment.

Two men had been talking in the shadows some distance from her. They had been talking for some time, but in low tones. Now one of them raised his voice.

"I tell you those films ain't got no chance to travel back to the States! How many times do I have to tell you that, you fool, before you believes me?"

CHAPTER X

DANGER

RUTH'S dreaming mood vanished on the instant. Every nerve and muscle alert, ears strained to hear the further conversation of the men, she stood rigidly by the rail, waiting.

But it was of no use. The man who had raised his voice in a moment of anger, had evidently regretted his carelessness and resolved not to make such a slip again. At any rate, the voices of the men had sunk to a whisper which could not reach even Ruth's eager ears.

Fearful that some plot was hatching, the girl's thought immediately flashed to the two men on shipboard whom she had suspected from the first, Noggs and Dawson.

On impulse, she resolved to creep forward toward the point where the two men had hidden themselves behind a coil of rope. She would, she determined resolutely, either find out from their conversation what they were up to, or, at least, learn the identity of the two men.

She stepped back a pace or two until she came

within the shadow of the cabin. Then, with beating heart, she crept forward inch by inch toward the spot where the muttering of the conspirators still continued.

Suddenly she paused, hand at throat, body crushed back against the cabin.

The men had evidently finished their talk—were coming straight toward her! She dared not think what might happen should these men, who she had already come to believe were desperadoes of the lowest order, catch her there. They would know she had been listening.

No more chance, even to think!

Two shadows loomed before her, so close to her that she could have touched the nearest of them by stretching out her hand. They were still talking in that guarded undertone and were so absorbed in their evil plotting that they did not notice her. Or perhaps the cabin sheltered her better than she had dared to hope. At any rate, they kept right on past her, heads close together, almost touching, and her ears caught one muttered sentence.

"That girl's no fool. She's the one we've got to watch out for." The two shadows passed into the deeper shadows beyond.

The danger past, Ruth relaxed against the cabin wall, weak and faint. But she smiled grimly to herself.

"Yes, Noggs, and Dawson, too," she murmured from between tight-pressed lips, "you will have to watch out for me. Because, you see, you have given me my warning now. Very much obliged to you, I am sure!"

And she turned and fled below, to creep belatedly into her bed, shivering and half frightened.

What was it they meant to do? Oh, if she could have heard just a little more of that conversation!

The morning, instead of, as usual, dispelling her doubts, found Ruth in a still more troubled state of mind than on the night before.

The two conspirators were Noggs and Dawson, of course, the men she had suspected from the first. She had recognized their voices and figures up there in the shadows of the deck.

But what had they meant by saying that the films would never reach the United States?

They were planning to destroy them, that was plain enough. Then another supposition flashed through her mind: Perhaps these two men had been planted on the boat for the purpose of stealing the films and turning them over to a rival firm.

The rival concern would never dare to use them as they were, of course, but with some changes the films could be disguised.

She thought of her picture of the iceberg and

the beginning of her "feature film," whose first scenes had been shot on the ship, and something tightened in her throat.

They should never have her precious films, never! She would remain on watch all day and every night, if it were necessary.

But on sober second thought she realized that this could not be done. She not only must have her rest at night in order to do good work on her picture, but she must also be away from the ship for hours at a time, for whole days, when on location.

There was Tom, of course. She could take the problem to him and hope that he could suggest some solution. But Tom was impulsive and hot-headed, as she knew too well, and could not, she was afraid, be relied on for calm judgment in a case of this sort.

And then again, she was tormented by the thought that she really had no evidence against these men. She had overheard them plotting, to be sure, but she could not even swear to their identity. If they were now in an Eastern port where sailors could be picked up readily, she might take the matter quietly to Mr. Hammond with a request that he discharge the men, should such a move, in his estimation, be necessary.

But here both he and Captain Humphreys would be reluctant to discharge two of the crew

on such flimsy evidence as she was able to bring forward.

And yet, how could she go about her business day by day, how put the best of herself into her great picture, when she would be worried hourly about the safety of her films?

She could hide them, of course. But no hiding place would be safe from such scoundrels as Dawson and Noggs.

In the end she compromised with herself by determining to take Helen into her confidence.

This she did, and her chum, instead of taking the whole affair lightly, as she had feared she might, seemed impressed with the gravity of the situation and discussed eagerly with Ruth ways and means of "routing the villains."

"That is what greatness means, Ruth," said Helen, at last, after an hour of fruitless argument. "One cannot be great without making enemies. It is undoubtedly rivals of the Alectrion Film Corporation or of your company who have hatched this scheme. I suppose we can take it for granted that Noggs and Dawson are merely humble tools in the hands of the mighty."

"They are not humble enough, that is where the trouble lies," sighed Ruth. "No matter what we may think of the characters of Dawson and Noggs, we should have a wholesome respect for the kind of low cunning which would be most

likely to make them successful in an undertaking like this."

"But what are you going to do, Ruth?" asked Helen, curiously. "Surely you must have made plans of some sort to thwart these men."

Reluctantly Ruth shook her head.

"I can't think of a thing, except the obvious solution of hiding the films; and that is more likely to be an evasion than a solution," she admitted. "That is why I came to you for advice, my dear."

"I only wish I could give it to you, Ruthie," said Helen sincerely, her usually merry face frankly troubled. "But I am quite willing to admit that just at present my brain is a complete vacuum as far as helpful suggestions are concerned. The best I can do for you is to advise that we lie low for the present and keep our eyes open. First thing you know, we will have some regular evidence against these two rascals. And then watch us act!"

Loth as she was to accept this advice, Ruth was finally forced to admit that it was the best she could do. At any rate, even if they should succeed in getting possession of the films, the two men would find it extremely difficult to get away with their spoils, unless they stole the *Ice Bird,* which was hardly a probable procedure!

The following morning Ruth and Helen, Chess

and Tom went ashore. Ruth and Tom were on business bent, Helen and Chess avowedly on pleasure.

Helen, who had, like Ruth, longed all her life to visit the far North, declared she intended to miss not one hour in this enchanted country. As for Chess, he made no secret of his design to visit again the cabins of Anton and Pierre and see if, through them, he might not pick up some useful information regarding his uncle's property. He had a document in his pocket which he intended to show to the traders in the hope that they might either be able to locate the tract for him, or refer him to some one who could.

When Helen heard of his intention she said that she would go with him, provided—this with a saucy flash of her eyes—Ruth and Tom would not be lonesome!

So Ruth and Tom were left to the important and absorbing task of finding the proper location for the filming of the first picture on shore.

Tom carried a rifle, and about Ruth's waist was strung a belt containing cartridges and a revolver. For though they were not expecting trouble, as Ruth had said, it was always wise in Baffin Land to be prepared for it.

They were a long time in finding the spot for which Ruth sought. Several times Tom found

what seemed to him a perfect setting for the film, but each time Ruth had some objection to offer.

Tom, while puzzled, did not question her judgment. He was aware that, as far as the making of moving pictures was concerned, it was far superior to his. His part in the partnership was preëminently the business end, though neither acted without consultation in any case.

Then, at last, they found it—a dream of a spot with the hollow just where a hollow should be and a snowy ridge in the background, fringed with stunted trees.

Tom, approaching this ridge to get a better view of the place, stopped suddenly dead in his tracks, checked by a horrified cry from Ruth.

"Tom! Quick! Drop to the ground! And for goodness' sake, lie still!"

CHAPTER XI

A POLAR BEAR

Tom obeyed instinctively, though he had no idea of the reason for Ruth's sharp order. He had had no warning of danger. But he dropped swiftly to the ground nevertheless, and lay sprawled out there as still as death.

The sharp report of Ruth's revolver cut the stillness of the air. Again and again the report sounded.

Then an unsteady laugh from Ruth and the sound of her running toward him.

"It is all right, Tom. Get up quickly!"

In bewilderment, Tom got to his feet and stretched out an arm to steady the girl.

"What was it? You fired a shot—"

"Three!" corrected Ruth hysterically. Then added more calmly: "It was a bear, Tom—a great white polar bear!"

"Where?" cried Tom, glancing swiftly about him.

"Oh, you need not look for it. I told you it was gone. I think my shots scared it away."

"Didn't wing him, did you?" asked Tom soberly, as his glance still swept the scene about him.

"No, I am sure I didn't. After the first shot," she added, and the trembling of her voice threatened hysteria, "I thought he was going to spring. Tom, it was awful!"

"I know—I know!" he soothed.

"I hardly knew what I was doing. I fired again, and the bear turned and began to slink off, baring its teeth at me. I don't know how my finger found the trigger, but I fired the third time."

"Well, the beggar's gone, and that's the main thing," said Tom, briskly. "You were wonderful to act the way you did, Ruth. I certainly owe my life to you. Why didn't you let me use my rifle?" he added curiously. "A rifle is much better for big game than a pistol, you know; and at that close range I could have winged the beggar, sure. We would have had a little trophy to take back to the ship with it."

"Please, Tom, I can't joke about it just yet," said Ruth, in a low voice, and Tom saw that she was shivering with nervousness. "We have found the location for to-morrow's work and—I want to get back to the boat!"

"Surest thing you know," Tom responded, with alacrity. "What you need is a good dinner of

corned-beef hash to set you on your feet again, Ruthie."

Ruth laughed unsteadily.

"I feel as though I would never eat another thing again," she said.

On the way back to the *Ice Bird,* no matter how hard Tom tried to turn the conversation on cheerful and matter-of-fact subjects, he realized that Ruth was still thinking of the bear. She glanced continually over her shoulders, and once when a twig cracked under his foot, jumped as though she had been shot.

"Tom, will bears attack a human being—without provocation, I mean?" she asked, in the middle of his conversation about Chess and the two trappers who were to be in the picture.

"Not as a rule," returned Tom, seeing that she was too full of the subject to be beguiled away from it, for the present at least. "I don't know much about the creatures, but I think that with the exception of the she-bear when her young are threatened, a bear is more inclined to run than attack. Of course, if it is cornered, that is quite a different thing."

"The yellow bear is the most vicious, isn't it?" she asked, strangely eager to pursue a subject that revolted her. "I think I learned that once in school, away back in the dark ages."

"Yes, the yellow bear will sometimes attack.

It is smaller than the white polar bear and swifter. But why," he added quizzically, "talk about these wild gentry when I can see the subject scares you to death?"

"I am not scared in the least," retorted Ruth, drawing herself up. "I was merely asking for a little information." Then her manner changed, and she clung to him and murmured: "Oh, Tom! Your narrow escape!"

They found upon reaching the *Ice Bird* that Helen and Chess were there before them and were full of excitement concerning their visit to Anton Delabarre and Pierre Briais.

"It certainly is a small world, after all," said Chess.

"That is a very original remark, Chess Copley, I must say!" Helen took him up smartly. Her fiancé only grinned at her.

"I was not aiming at originality, my love," he said, knowing that to call her that in public always enraged her. "I was merely stating a well-known fact."

"Perhaps before long you two will stop fighting and tell us what it is all about," remarked Ruth hopefully. They were all seated about the tables in the cheerfully lighted cabin and Ruth found that Tom had spoken truthfully. She did feel considerably better after her second helping of corned-beef hash!

"Well, you know those two traders who were supposed to have charge of my uncle's property—"

"Oh, Chess, why will you beat about the bush so?" sighed Helen. "Are you not aware that they knew all about those fur traders before we ever started on this trip?"

"Oh, keep still, do, Sis," urged Tom amiably. "Can't you let the man tell his story in his own way? What about the traders, Chess?"

"They turn out to be none other than *our* two good friends Delabarre and Briais!" disclosed Chess triumphantly. "Now what do you know about that?"

"I think it is just fine, Chess," said Ruth heartily. "And I repeat the saying that Helen so strongly objects to. It is a very small world!"

"But how did you find this out?" asked Tom eagerly.

"Just my natural genius in nosing out facts," replied Chess, puffing out his chest.

"Hear modesty speak!" sighed Helen.

"I started asking the old fellows questions about this property of my uncle's," Chess continued calmly. "As soon as they heard the name of Copley they pricked up their ears and showed keen interest. The pow-wow ended in a contest as to who could speak the most words in a minute

and make the most gestures. It was great, wasn't it, Helen?"

"Immense!" agreed Helen, over her third helping of hash. "Some of the time they talked French, and I cannot see yet how you managed to understand them, Chess."

"Again my native genius," retorted Chess, and Helen threatened to throw a biscuit at him.

"But what arrangements did you make about the property?" asked Ruth, genuinely interested. "Are they going to take you to it? And is it really yours?"

"Oh, it is mine, all right—or, rather, my uncle's. And we are going to take a trip there in a few days—as soon as the two men can arrange to get away. To-night I intend to write to Uncle Jim. Just make believe he won't dote on me after this."

"You flatter yourself!" retorted Helen, but nothing could dim the optimism of Chess Copley just then.

Ruth and Tom did not tell any one of their narrow escape from a polar bear. By tacit agreement they remained silent upon the subject, knowing that to speak of it would only alarm the company and do no good to any one.

It was much later that evening after they had retired to their stateroom that Helen turned to her chum with a startling disclosure.

"I hate to tell you, Ruthie; but I know you would never forgive me for keeping it from you."

"What is it? Tell me quickly!" commanded Ruth, with a premonition of trouble.

Helen lowered her voice glancing about her as though the very walls might have ears.

"To-day I came in here unexpectedly, just before you and Tom came back, and found—"

"What?" cried Ruth, as Helen hesitated.

"Our friend Noggs in this room!"

CHAPTER XII

ON LOCATION

RUTH's face turned white. She grasped Helen's arm and shook it, almost roughly.

"What was he doing in here?"

"Quite obviously going through our belongings," said Helen, who was the cooler of the two.

"Helen, I can scarcely believe it!" Ruth's voice was a husky whisper. "What did he do—when he saw you?"

"Ducked!" replied Helen laconically, but explicitly. "And I stood still like a loon and let the fellow get away," she added, disgustedly.

"But tell me—tell me all about it!" urged Ruth, sinking down on the edge of the bed. The next moment she had jumped to her feet like a wild thing and had wrenched open the door of the locker at one end of the room.

"He was trying the combination when I came in," said Helen, understanding the action. "Lucky you had that kind of lock put on the

door, Ruthie. An ordinary lock would have been no protection at all."

Ruth did not reply immediately. She was searching eagerly, feverishly for her precious films.

A gasp of relief announced that she had found them. They were all there.

Only then did she turn to Helen, and the latter was shocked by the pallor of her face.

"Don't feel so cut up about it, honey," Helen urged, putting an arm about her chum and drawing her down on the edge of the berth. "The man failed to walk off with a single thing, and that ought to make you feel rather good, I should think."

"But, Helen, don't you see?" cried Ruth, in a low, tense voice. "It is not only this attempt. There will be others, and I cannot be on the ship every moment. I cannot guard my films continually."

"No, of course you can't," agreed Helen thoughtfully. "It is a pretty bad situation, I must admit. I would give a good deal to know what the fellow wants with those films."

"That does not matter!" cried Ruth, impatiently. "It is *that* he wants them that counts. Helen I must think of some new place to put them, at once."

"I should think the locker was safe enough

with the combination lock," protested Helen, but Ruth jumped to her feet and began to pace the room excitedly.

"If I could only think of some other place!" Helen heard her mutter to herself, and it was just then that Helen was visited by an inspiration.

"Why not make some excuse and have your films put in Mr. Hammond's locker with those made by the scientific party?" she suggested. "Mr. Hammond has a guard there night and day, you know."

Ruth looked at her and slowly her brow cleared. In the relief of the moment she came over and treated Helen to a hearty hug.

"You are a wonder, Helen," she said. "I blame myself for not thinking of that long ago. Oh, Helen, I am tired!" she added suddenly. "I do believe I will go to bed."

"And that is the most sensible thing you have said in the last hour," remarked Helen briskly, as she drew the pins from her heavy dark hair.

But for all Ruth's intense weariness, she did not sleep soundly. Perhaps that is the reason she was awake when a hand stealthily turned the knob of her door.

For a breathless second Ruth lay motionless, her heart beating madly. They had locked the door before they turned out the light, she was

certain. Yet—was she certain? She had trusted that to Helen.

With perfect clearness in the dead stillness of the night she heard the click of the lock as it slipped back. Entirely independent of any desire on her part, she found herself on her feet and stumbling across the narrow room to the door.

She turned the key in the lock, flung back the door.

"Who is there?" she cried in a voice that to her sounded painfully weak and inadequate.

There was no answer. The faint flickering of the oil lamp bracketed to the wall, revealed nothing.

In a swift revulsion of feeling, Ruth retreated into the room, slammed the door, turned the key in the lock, and stood against the panels, gasping.

"What is it?" cried Helen, wide awake and sitting up in her berth. "Ruth, is anything the matter? Are you hurt?"

Ruth came slowly across the room to sit shivering on the foot of Helen's bed. Her hand, as it grasped her chum's outstretched one, was icy cold.

"You are freezing, Ruthie. Jump in here with me," ordered Helen, moving over to make room for her. Then, when Ruth had numbly obeyed, she asked again,

"What was it, Ruthie, dear? Can you talk about it now?"

"I—am developing a—bad case of nerves, I guess," said Ruth, trying to laugh and failing miserably. "I thought I heard someone at the door, Helen. I thought I heard the knob turn. I was not certain the door was locked—"

"Yes?" prompted Helen swiftly.

"I jumped out of bed and opened the door, but there was nobody there. I must have dreamed it, I guess."

"I locked the door," said Helen. "No one could have gotten in."

"But I could not know that," said Ruth, and Helen patted her cold hand reassuredly.

"Of course you couldn't, honey," she said.

For a moment or two the two girls were busy with their thoughts while Ruth, despite her determination not to, kept listening for the stealthy turning of the knob.

"Since there was no one outside when you opened the door, that seems to prove that you imagined it all, Ruthie dear," said Helen, after a long pause. "Are you sure you locked the door this time?"

"Rather!" said Ruth, wearily adding, as she snuggled closer to Helen: "And now let us try to forget that I have been so foolish and go to sleep."

"All right. But you stay here with me. I guess we can manage two in this bunk for one night, and it will be pleasant to have company."

In this Ruth readily agreed. The happenings of the day had been too much for her, and there was nothing she longed for quite so much as warm and human contact with her kind.

Directly after breakfast the following morning Ruth did as Helen had suggested and asked Mr. Hammond to keep her films with his in a locker that was very like a safe.

He assented heartily, for the manager of the Alectrion Film Corporation had long since come to the conclusion that when Ruth Fielding wanted a thing there was always a good reason for her wanting it.

The change once made, Ruth breathed more freely and turned her attention to taking her first "shot" on land.

She gathered together her entire company and urged upon them the need for haste. There was much to be done—and well done—for the season in which they could make pictures was short, at best, and they could not afford to waste a moment.

Her enthusiasm was infectious and her company displayed a vim and energy such as they had not shown since the beginning of the trip.

They reached the scene of the first shot, and Hooley was enthusiastic over the location.

"We could not fail to make a good picture with this setting, Miss Fielding," he said, adding, with a grin: "If the actors fall down, there is still the scenery."

"But the actors are not going to fall down," cried Ruth energetically. "They are going to give me their very best effort."

As she spoke the words she fancied that something moved against the gleaming whiteness of the snow. It was only her overwrought imagination, of course. But in her heart she knew she could never look upon that fir-crowned ridge without a shudder.

No one but she herself knew how close Tom had been to death the day before. And Tom meant so much to her. Of course, business was one thing, and ambition another, but, after all, there was only one Tom! Every day Ruth realized this more and more.

CHAPTER XIII

RUTH TAKES A HAND

THE picture progressed rapidly, and as Ruth became more absorbed in her work she became also more certain that her dream of a superfilm was about to be realized.

Of course it was hard work and many a night the young author and director went to bed so tired she scarcely knew whether she were dead or alive. Tom noted this and shook his head.

"You mustn't overdo it, Ruth," he warned her kindly.

"Oh, I'm all right, Tom," she answered. "And the film is going gloriously."

"Glad to know it is going to suit you. But I repeat, be careful of yourself," he returned, with a look at her that meant a good deal.

Anita Townsend revealed unexpected dramatic ability, and even Hooley, the unemotional and cynical, declared her a "knockout."

In the scene within the shack where Anita, as Gloria Dale, finds her lover raving in the delir-

ium of fever, Anita thrilled them all with her portrayal of the heroine.

Thinking her lover is about to die, the girl sinks to her knees beside the cot on which he is lying and seizes him by the shoulders, shaking him wildly and crying his name. In the story she is supposed to weep, and the tears that rained down Anita's lovely, grief-stricken face were not artificial. With the abandon of the true artist, she had lost herself in the part of Gloria Dale. For the moment, she *was* Gloria Dale.

The evening following the taking of this shot, Ruth was quiet, almost awed by the events of the day. The fulfilling of an ideal was a solemn thing, after all.

It was Helen who was destined to discover the "fly in the ointment" of her exultation. She broached the subject to Ruth that night as they were getting ready for bed.

"I suppose you have noticed, Ruthie," she began slowly, as though reluctant to disturb her chum's content, "how strangely your handsome leading man is acting lately?"

Ruth, who had been brushing her hair, paused with brush poised in air to regard Helen curiously.

"In just what way?" she asked.

"Why, he tries continually to cover the spotlight. Several times to-day I noticed that you were forced to speak to him about it."

"Oh, that!" replied Ruth, a faint line of annoyance forming between her brows. "Of course, it is trying but Grand has always been fond of turning his handsome profile to the camera. Since you mention it," she added slowly, "I certainly never have noticed him pushing himself forward as he has lately. I wonder—"

"Just so! So did I at first," interrupted Helen briskly. "But I have no cause to wonder any longer. I have watched that gentleman closely while you have been absorbed in Anita, Ruthie dear, and I have a pretty clear idea of what is the matter with him."

"I suppose you mean he is jealous," said Ruth slowly, and Helen nodded vigorously.

"Jealous is no word for it," she commented. "I tell you if he could feed Anita to the sharks, or the walruses, or whatever it is abounds around here, without making himself liable to a term in prison, he would do so with pleasure."

Ruth was silent. Although she was quite sure Helen exaggerated, she was nevertheless certain that there was something behind her remarks. Grand was jealous of Anita's sudden popularity, and this fact made him relish less than ever being pushed into the background and made to play second fiddle.

Ruth turned to Helen, the frown deeper on her forehead.

"You think this may affect the success of the picture?" she questioned, and again Helen's reply was vigorous.

"I certainly do, Ruth. This man in the story is supposed to be an ardent lover, perfectly wild about his Gloria, yet I bet you would never guess it by watching this leading man, Grand—especially lately."

"But good gracious, Helen, he has not had a chance yet to show any emotion whatsoever—not since the very beginning of the picture. The poor man has been unconscious most of the time."

"One can register dislike even in unconsciousness," retorted Helen, and Ruth was left to study out this cryptic statement.

"Anyway, Ruth," Helen went on, after a rather long silence, "you just wait till the time comes for our hero to do the lover act. I bet his type of lovemaking would not get across with any movie fan in creation. Grand dislikes our Anita so intensely that he cannot even put his mind on the story."

Ruth was amazed at this unusual dissertation on the part of the usually light and careless Helen; but she had found that Helen's ideas were often worth considering, and so she gave this one her most careful consideration.

The more she considered it the more she became convinced that Helen was right. And if so,

was she going to sit back and allow a petty thing like the jealousy of a leading man spoil her picture?

"I will speak to Grand about it at once," she cried, suddenly angry. She turned to leave the room, forgetful that she had begun to undress until Helen seized her by the skirt and laughingly drew her back.

"You cannot go with your hair hanging down your back," she said, adding, as Ruth began hastily to do up her heavy mane: "Anyway, Ruthie, I don't think I would speak to our hero, if I were you. Probably that would only make him worse."

"You think so? Why?" asked Ruth, a trifled nettled at this flood of unasked advice.

"Because he would think you were taking Anita's part. And, dear knows, he is jealous enough already."

"Then just what would you advise me to do?" asked Ruth, in a voice that was ominously quiet.

Helen, slipping her nightdress over her head, took no notice of the impending storm.

"Speak to Anita," she suggested cheerfully. "Get her to vamp our hero. That sort of thing generally has wonderful results."

"Yes—of one kind or another," agreed Ruth, with a short laugh. "Much thanks for your advice, Helen—and I will give it my most earnest

consideration. Just the same, I hardly think your remedy will work a cure."

"You can always try anything once," said Helen lightly. "Hurry up and turn out the light, Ruth. Let's sleep on it."

And though Helen's fly seemd a little fly indeed, it had effectually spoiled Ruth's ointment—for that night, at least.

The next morning she went in search of Anita with some vague idea of putting Helen's advice into practice. Something must be done, and that quickly. They were almost ready for the filming of the love scenes, which were to be the climactic scenes of the play. If, as Helen had intimated, Grand should fall down in his lovemaking, there was no question about it, her picture would be ruined.

She found Anita in a little huddled heap upon her bed, sobbing her heart out.

Surprised and anxious, Ruth sat down beside the girl and gathered her in her arms, gently pushing back the fair hair. Anita clung to her, still sobbing passionately.

Ruth knew better than to try to stop the flood of tears just then. So she said nothing, continuing to hold the girl close and permitting her to have her cry out.

At last Anita sat up, wiping her eyes and striving to regain some measure of composure.

"I am sorry you found me like this, Miss Fielding," she said, her breath still catching in an occasional sob. "I never meant that you should. I suppose you think me an awful goose and horribly ung-grateful."

"I am sorry that you are unhappy, Anita," said Ruth gently. "If you are in trouble and I can help you, please let me."

"No one can help me," cried the girl passionately. "It is Mr. Grand. He hates me. You must have seen it. Any one can see it!"

The girl's passionate outburst revealed to Ruth a rather breathtaking possibility.

"And you love him very much, do you not?" she hazarded, watching the girl's face closely.

Anita looked up quickly, a flush spreading from throat to brow.

"Yes," she said, simply, "I love him."

"But no one would know that, Anita," Ruth chided gently. "I have noticed how coldly you treat Mr. Grand when you are not acting in the picture."

As though she had touched a torch to powder the girl flared up again.

"And do you think I want him to know it—when he hates me?" she cried passionately. "Do you think I have no pride?"

"Sometimes love is stronger than pride, Anita," Ruth returned gently. "And I do not think Mr.

Grand hates you. Probably because of the way you treat him, he thinks the dislike is on your side."

Anita studied this for a moment and then looked up with hope in her eyes.

"Do you think the way I act would make a difference?" she asked hesitantly.

"I think it might make all the difference in the world!" Ruth assured her heartily.

From that moment Anita's manner changed entirely toward the leading man. She was her charming, irresistible self as she was with every one else.

More than this, Grand's sullen manner changed. He no longer turned away when the dainty star appeared.

When Helen noticed the difference and questioned her about it, Ruth put her off with vague replies. She had a superstitious feeling that if one boasted too much about luck of any sort, it was liable to depart more swiftly than it had come. Then too, she felt a loyal reluctance to betraying Anita's confidence.

Day followed crowded day, filled to the brim with excitement and adventure and hard work. The great scene where the heroine, Gloria, braves the snowy wastes to bring aid to her lover, becomes snowblind, lost in the blizzard and finally

stumbles upon the cabin of the trapper, had been done and admirably done.

Later her two latest acquisitions, Delabarre and Briais, having been well-coached by Ruth herself, played the part of the Frenchmen as only men born and bred in the wilds could have played it.

Tom was enthusiastic in praise of Ruth's judgment in securing the services of Anton and Pierre, declaring that the scenes in which they had taken part would prove the most striking in the picture.

But Ruth shook her head, smiling doubtfully.

"The most important scenes are still to come, Tom, and I will not be happy until they are successfully filmed."

She was thinking, of course, of those final love scenes. Though the enmity between her two stars seemed to have abated a great deal, she was by no means sure that Grand would give himself to his part in those last climactic scenes as he had always previously done.

They had been so busy that she had had no opportunity of speaking to Anita alone. Then, one day, while in search of a new location, Ruth came unexpectedly upon the two who were always uppermost in her mind.

They neither saw her nor heard her, the reason being, probably, that they were completely absorbed in each other. Grand had his arms about

the dainty star and Anita nestled up to him as though she did not object.

"How did you know I cared for you like this?" Grand asked in his deep and resonant voice, and Anita's soft reply came floating back to Ruth.

"Perhaps because I—cared so much myself!"

Quietly Ruth turned away, and there were tears in her eyes.

Her picture was saved. And so was something else.

CHAPTER XIV

HUNTING THE WALRUS

THE following morning Mr. Hammond came to Ruth with an invitation.

"We are going walrus hunting to-day, Miss Ruth, and we have hired some natives to give the proper local color and also to serve in the very important capacity of guides. We want you to take a vacation and come along with us."

Ruth hesitated, thinking of the work she had planned for that day, and Mr. Hammond took that moment to further weaken her resolution.

"Now, don't go thinking you must work yourself to death," he bullied good-naturedly. "I have heard you are doing great work on your picture and have made considerable progress. I consider you have earned a day off. Come, Miss Ruth—all work and no play, you know—"

Tom and Chess, coming up at this minute, added their pleading to Mr. Hammond's, and Ruth reluctantly gave in. They none of them, she reflected, as she went below to make herself

ready for the adventure, not even Mr. Hammond, would realize that her work was the most absorbing kind of play to her. Who wanted to go walrus hunting, anyway?

Of course the scientists would be along, with their cameras, to get the most interesting pictures and details possible. But with this Ruth had nothing to do. It had long ago been settled that the Ruth Fielding Company should not interfere in any way with the doings of the scientific group, nor was Ruth in any manner to try to "steal the thunder" of the scientists when it came to shooting unusual pictures that had nothing to do with the girl's scenario.

"From what I have read about it, it seems to me that the whole thing is a cruel pastime," Ruth complained to Helen. "The Eskimos used to kill whole flocks of them or droves of them, or whatever it is they go in, just for the fun of it."

"Well, I suppose all hunting is more or less cruel," remarked Helen philosophically. "But I wouldn't take it to heart, if I were you, Ruthie. Our brave hunters would probably kill just as many whether we were in the party or not."

"At any rate we would not have to see it," grumbled Ruth, who hated to see a fly suffer—much less a full-grown walrus. However, she has said she would go and, Ruth-like, she was resolved to see the thing through.

They found the natives who were to serve as guides waiting for them and guarding a veritable fleet of small, flat-bottomed boats.

Ruth had come across more than one flat-faced, stolid Eskimo in the course of her picture-making. But this was the first time she had seen a group of them, and her interest was genuine.

"I wonder if anything would make them flicker an eyelash," Helen whispered in her chum's ear. "I have an irresistible desire to go up to one of them and pass my hand quickly several times before his eyes—the way you do with babies to see if they can see. It would be an interesting experiment!"

"Control yourself," admonished Ruth, laughing. "I fear you would do more than astonish the natives, at that rate."

The members of the scientific party had brought all of their cameras along, presumably in the hope of photographing a herd of walrus in their native element. Chess commented upon this ardor with disgust.

"Some people believe in working twenty-six hours out of the twenty-four," he commented.

"Which could never be said of you, could it, Chess dear?" said Helen sweetly, at which Chess only grinned.

The entire party embarked at last in the small boats. As they were guided expertly among the

heavy ice floes that blocked the water, Ruth's interest in the adventure began to revive.

"If I do not have to witness the massacre I know I shall have a lovely time," she told Tom.

"I would give a great deal to know whither we were bound," said Tom, his narrowed eyes seeking the bleak horizon. "To one of those small islands, beloved by our friend, the walrus, I suppose."

"Just how do they hunt walruses, Tom?" asked Ruth. "I know I am very ignorant, but I would really like to know."

"I read about it somewhere once, although I must say my ideas are somewhat vague," returned Tom. "I know it struck me as being a rather cruel business at the time.

"You see, the walrus is a sluggish creature, and the natives take full advantage of that fact. If he can sneak up until he is almost upon a walrus family, then it is all over but the shouting—and the massacre."

"How do you mean?" asked Ruth, fascinated despite herself.

"Suppose the whole party of walruses has gathered on an immense ice floe, for instance," said Tom, warming to his story. "The Eskimos' mouths water as they take in the picture. They sneak up gradually upon the unsuspecting herd and surround the ice floe. Then they close in

quickly, stabbing and killing the animals on the edge of the floe. The others, being slow and clumsy of action on land, cannot escape over the bodies of the dead animals, and of course it is an easy matter to dispose of them."

"I think it is horrible. The poor animals don't have the sign of a chance!" exclaimed the girl indignantly. Then she asked incredulously: "Won't they fight back when they are attacked?"

"Not on land, as a general thing. They feel themselves at a disadvantage and their instinct is naturally to reach the water. Once in the water the story is different. But you see, the natives depend largely on the element of surprise. They kill 'em off before they have a chance to escape."

"Well, I think the whole thing is horrid," repeated Ruth. Then she added anxiously: "I suppose it is not possible for us to go back now, Tom? Do you suppose Mr. Hammond would be very much offended?"

"I am sorry if I have spoiled your pleasure with all the gory details," said Tom penitently. "Of course we will go back, if you really want to, Ruth."

But something dogged in Ruth rose to the surface and she determined not to back down. After all, this was an adventure such as she might never have again, and from the standpoint of expe-

rience she felt it was worth while to see it through.

They did not speak for some little time as the natives paddled stolidly on. Then it was Tom who reopened the conversation, and there was a new and half-embarrassed note in his voice that made Ruth glance at him sharply.

"I have been wondering if I ought not tell you something, Ruth, and I have come to the conclusion that I ought," he said. His glance as it met hers was worried.

"What is it, Tom?" she asked, beneath her breath. "If it is bad news, please tell it quickly."

"Oh, it isn't anything to get excited about," protested Tom quickly. "It is only that I have been watching that fellow, Noggs, aboard the *Ice Bird* rather closely lately, and the more I watch him, the more I am convinced he can stand it," he added grimly.

"I came to that conclusion long ago, Tom," said Ruth quietly. "Do you mind telling me what he has been doing—lately?"

"Merely acting suspiciously, that's all, and hanging around where he has no business to be," returned Tom, adding solicitously as he saw the look of anxiety deepen on her face: "I would not have worried you with it at all, if I had not been practically positive I saw the man trying to get into your stateroom the other evening. He beat it before I could nab him, but I am pretty

positive it was Noggs, all right. Nervy beggar. I've a mind to break his neck."

"That would not do any good," replied Ruth slowly. "Except to put your own neck in the noose, as well," she added.

At this point they were interrupted by the natives, who intimated by means of the sign language and more or less expressive grunts that they were nearing the playground of the walrus and that silence was in order.

Ruth saw what she had been too absorbed to notice before—a small island directly before them. The mass of snow-covered ground seemed to have risen straight out of the water. Indeed, if it had not been for its immobility, Ruth would have taken it for a gigantic iceberg.

The fleet of small boats closed in upon the island silently, furtively—Ruth thought—several of the boats encircling the island and being lost to view.

Ruth noticed that the entire surface of the island was dotted with dark, sprawling shapes.

She was seeing a herd of walruses for the first time. The thought held a thrill. If the purpose of the party had not been the extinction of some, if not all, the animals huddled on the island, Ruth would have enjoyed that thrill immensely.

As it was—

"Don't let the Eskimos take us too close," she

whispered to Tom. "Make them stand off from the island. I don't intend to take part in this thing."

But she was too late. They were already close upon the island.

With a shout the natives charged to the attack.

Ruth saw a spear flash in the air and sink itself into the hide of the nearest animal. She hid her eyes from the sight of its death struggle and begged Tom in a strangled voice to make them take her away from there.

All about her the frenzied, cruel game went on, while Ruth cowered on the seat of the boat, continuing to hide her eyes from the horrid sight.

Then Tom's voice, on a new note, reached her ears.

"Look out for that bull! He has it in for this boat. Look out, I tell you!"

CHAPTER XV

FOLLOWED

At Tom's hoarse shout of warning, Ruth opened her eyes. Never would she forget the sight that met them.

A raging bull walrus, wounded, but not fatally, had risen in the water directly in front of their boat. He seemed gigantic to Ruth's startled gaze, with his great ivory tusks gleaming in the sunlight.

It seemed for the moment as though they could not escape disaster, for the walrus, when once roused from its sluggish state to the point of attacking an enemy, is a dangerous foe indeed.

"Oh, Tom, what shall we do? He is coming right at us!"

"I'll give him a bullet or two—maybe that will stop him," was the quick answer, and an instant later the young man's revolver rang out. But the boat was bumping amid the ice and his aim was not good and two bullets merely grazed the thick hide of the bull walrus, doing no damage.

"Ki, ya!" shouted one of the natives. "Ki, ya!" And he pushed Tom to one side.

Quick as thought the Eskimo who was near the front of the boat leaned forward, driving his spear with terrific force straight at the eye of the infuriated beast.

His aim was true. There was a convulsive movement and a heavy splash as the walrus sank from view. The spear had entered its brain, killing it instantly.

"Let us get away from here!" cried Ruth, in a husky voice she scarcely recognized as her own. "I cannot bear any more, Tom! Please try to make them understand."

After several efforts, Tom finally succeeded in convincing the Eskimos that they really did wish to return to their ship—a white man's whimsy which seemed incredible to the natives, especially while the fight was still on—and with a feeling of intense relief Ruth realized that the boat was heading away from the scene of the hunt.

"If that is sport, then I am sure that I can live without it for the rest of my days," she told Tom vehemently.

"I suppose they get something out of it—commercially," said Tom thoughtfully. "The tusks must be worth something as ivory, and I suppose they get oil from the carcass."

"Dear me! that beast that was going to attack

us had tusks big enough for two ordinary walruses," said Ruth. "I suppose I shall see those horrible things in my dreams as long as I live!"

"That was about as narrow an escape as we have had," agreed Tom soberly. "If it had not been for the quick action of our friend here," indicating one of the stolid Eskimos, "we should certainly have been out of luck."

Ruth nodded and sat quiet for a while, her eyes on the barren landscape. Suddenly she sat up and pointed ahead to a small boat dodging in and out among the ice floes.

"Evidently some one else has tired of the hunt," she said. "I wonder who it can be."

"Chess and Helen probably," guessed Tom. "I imagine an entertainment of that sort would not appeal much to Helen, in spite of her love of adventure."

He made motions to the Eskimos, directing them to approach the other boat. It took them only a moment or two to make sure that Tom's guess had been the correct one.

"Saw you coming away and thought we would follow you," Helen hailed them. "Didn't much care to see the last reel of that picture."

Back on the ship again, the Eskimo guides tipped generously for their services, the young folks settled down comfortably in the cabin to

enjoy some music before the others should return.

But before they had played one disc, Ruth thought of Tom's warning concerning the sailor, Noggs, and his crony.

She jumped to her feet with an exclamation and, saying that she would be back in a moment, she hurried off. She made for the small room, hardly more than a closet in one corner of which was the safe-like locker in which her films and those of the Alectrion Film Corporation were stored.

Once she thought she heard a step behind her, but when she paused to listen, only silence greeted her.

Still, bending over the safe with the knob of the combination in her hand, Ruth once more hesitated. She felt certain this time that she heard some one, that some one was following her.

So strong was the impression upon her that she even stepped out into the corridor, looking to right and left of her as she did so.

There was no one in sight and she stood there undecided, her breath coming quickly.

A quick fear had flashed into her mind.

Suppose either Noggs or his crony had been watching her, spying upon her? She had several times had the impression lately of being stealthily followed. Would it not be their natural move

to spy upon her when she opened the safe some time and so learn the combination.

"Either I am on the right track, or it's all stuff and nonsense and I'm causing myself a good deal of unnecessary anxiety," she thought, trying to force herself to think clearly and coherently. "It seems the height of absurdity for me to be afraid to open that safe and find whether my films are safe or not. And yet—"

She half turned as though to reënter the room. But she did not enter it. Something that seemed stronger than herself or her reason prevented her.

"I will wait and get somebody to come with me, later," she compromised with herself. "It may be foolish, but I don't dare open that safe just now."

She turned and retraced her steps toward the cabin where she had left her three friends, trying to walk slowly, while every instinct in her urged her to break into a run.

Footsteps, coming toward her!

For a moment she was tempted to dodge into one of the corridors that opened off the corridor. But immediately she conquered the impulse and walked steadily on.

She turned a corner and almost ran into—Tom!

She was amazed at his anxious face and the look of relief that flashed into it at sight of her.

"Ruth! Thank goodness you are all right!"

"Why, Tom, what is it? What is wrong?"

"Nothing—as long as you are here!" said Tom, feigning a lightness of tone that did not deceive the girl in the least.

"Don't evade me, Tom," she cried, standing before him and forcing him to meet her eyes. "Something has happened. Won't you tell?"

"I was a little anxious, that was all," returned Tom, as though half ashamed of his emotional outburst. "You stayed away so long that I came to look for you."

"Tom Cameron, you can be the most exasperating person at times," cried Ruth impatiently. "Don't you suppose I know you are keeping something from me?"

"It was only," Tom capitulated, "that I met that sailor, Noggs, coming from this direction."

"Oh!" gasped Ruth, her face white. "Then I was right after all!"

"Ruth, I have alarmed you," cried Tom, in quick concern. "I knew I ought not to tell you."

"You were quite right to tell me!" she cried vehemently. "It is better to know of a danger than to have it creep upon you unawares!"

And then, in response to Tom's puzzled query, Ruth told him of her belief, almost certainty,

that she had been followed to the locker room. And because of this conviction she had been actually afraid to open the safe.

"Come on now. We will open that safe together," said Tom, seizing her by the arm and turning her back in the direction of the locker room.

Ruth went with him, glad enough to make sure that her films were safe. It took them only a minute to ascertain that this was so, and Ruth was curiously glad when the safe was closed again and they had left the place.

"It is not a pleasant feeling to think of that man, stealthily waiting out there for me to open the safe that he might peer over my shoulder and discover the combination," said Ruth, with a shudder, and Tom's hands clenched.

"The scoundrel!" he growled. "I have a good mind to go and have it out with him."

"Not yet," cried Ruth softly but vehemently. "Not until we have proof!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE DOG TEAM

FROM that time on Ruth did not draw an easy breath on those occasions when she was forced to be away from the ship. Her belief that she was being followed as she went to the locker room, coupled with the coincidence of Tom's meeting Noggs in a part of the ship where he had no business to be, fostered her belief that the plotters would seek to carry out their designs in the near future.

Still she said nothing to Mr. Hammond for fear that, in his anger, he might do something that would only hasten matters. Tom, also, she bound to secrecy.

Meanwhile, Ruth was torn between two desires. She wanted to "camp" before the door of the locker room, in order to keep watch upon her precious films, and she knew that she must spend most of the daylight hours ashore in filming the last great scenes of her picture.

One morning, several days later, Chess and

Helen came to Ruth and asked her if she wanted to take part in a real adventure.

"If it is anything like walrus hunting—" Ruth began, but Chess cut her off with a good-natured laugh.

"It is nothing so savage, I can assure you," he said, and went on to explain that Anton Delabarre and Pierre Briais had announced that they were ready to help Chess locate his uncle's property.

"It seems it—the property—is only a short way from here, near a little Eskimo village called Anoo, as near as I could get it, and that the trip could easily be made in a couple of hours on snowshoes. Of course Helen had to put in to go along—"

"Well, I like that!" cried Helen. "As if you didn't urge me on your bended knees to go along!"

"My dear girl, you exaggerate," returned Chess indulgently. "I insist that at that moment my knees were so stiff with the cold that I could not have bent them."

"Yes, yes—go on!" laughed Tom, who had come up and joined the group. "Get to the point, Lasses."

"Well, when Helen put in to go along," continued Chess calmly, "Delabarre, like the gallant old chap he is, suggested that the lady might ride on a sled behind his dog team."

"And right here is where I prove my friend-

ship for you, Ruthie Fielding," Helen broke in. "I was quite sure that if Anton had a dog team, Pierre had also, and so I hinted—oh, in a most ladylike manner, I assure you—that it would be lovely if we only had two sleds—"

"Oh, Helen, how could you! Begging an invitation like that?"

"Now, you see! There is gratitude!" exclaimed Helen.

"So, to make a long story short and because I can see if it goes on this way we shall not learn the truth until it is too late to go at all," Chess put in, "I will add that Delabarre pointed out the quite obvious fact that there was room for two on his sled, and you were promptly and cordially invited to go along, Ruth. The old duffer seems to think a heap of you."

"Well, he is not the only one," said Tom. But he added ruefully: "I would like to know where I come in in this party."

"On snowshoes," laughed Chess. "You, and all the rest of us poor male critters, walk."

Ruth was delighted with the idea, for she had about decided that her company needed a rest before the taking of the last few pictures. Then, too, the prospect of riding in a real dog sled was an extremely alluring one.

"Better dress good and warmly," Tom warned her. "This is apt to be a pretty cold trip, you

know—especially for you and Helen. We fellows can keep warm with exercise."

But Ruth really did not need this advice. She had spent enough time in the frozen country to learn that the only way to keep warm was to wear plenty—and the right kind—of clothing.

After explaining to Mr. Hammond and the members of Ruth's company and warning them that they would probably not be home until near night, the quartette set out.

They had traveled only a short distance when they were met by Anton Delabarre with his dog sled.

The seat was a roomy one, considering the size of the sled, and it was lined with an animal skin whose thick silky fur almost made Ruth's mouth water.

There were more fur robes to be flung over the passengers, and these Ruth and Helen eyed with approval.

But it was the dog team that provoked their hearty and sincere admiration. There were eleven dogs in all, ten of them harnessed in pairs to the sled and the eleventh one, the leader, standing, with head thrown back, like the thoroughbred he was, at the head of the team.

The dog's name was Chio, and whenever Delabarre spoke to him, the eyes of the leader shone with adoration in their liquid depths that made

them almost human. This change was all the more remarkable because, as a general thing, the eyes of Chio were almost sullen, making his resemblance to a wolf very marked.

"They all look like wolves, don't they?" Helen whispered to Ruth, as they took their places on the sled.

"They are not very far removed from the timber wolves," answered Ruth, as she looked at the strong, lithe bodies of the dogs in front of her. "That is what makes them so swift and enduring, I suppose."

"Well, all I can hope is that they don't get a grudge against me," said Helen.

A crack of Delabarre's whip, a sharp command in French, and the dogs strained to the task before them, drawing the load of the girls and the sled through the heavy drifts as though it was nothing at all.

The boys followed on snowshoes, joking and laughing with Delabarre, who seemed in high good spirits.

Before long they struck a trail where the packed snow gave a better footing to the dogs. Immediately the speed of the animals increased, and with Anton Delabarre running beside the sled, cracking the whip above the animals, but never so much as touching a furry flank, the girls felt

that for the first time they were experiencing the sensation of flying.

"Helen, I would not have missed this for anything!" cried Ruth, drinking in great breaths of the frosty air, her cheeks glowing like roses. "It was great of you to get me an invitation to this kind of a party."

"Ah—there speaks gratitude at last," chuckled Helen, adding, as she pulled the fur robes tighter about it: "Glad you like it, Ruthie. I must admit I am getting considerable kick out of it, myself."

The result was that they reached Anoo, the tiny Eskimo village of which Chess had spoken, far too soon to suit the girls. They felt childishly disappointed when Delabarre drew his team to a standstill and pointed with his whip to a huddled group of igloos before them.

"We have arrive, M'sieur," he said, to Chess. "These people can tell you more than I myself 'bout that you wish to know."

Helen announced that she would go with Chess, but Ruth and Tom preferred to stroll about a bit and look at the village, they said. However, Chess said that he especially wanted Tom to come with him, so Ruth declared her willingness to do some casual exploring by herself.

Tom was loth to leave her alone, even for a few moments, and only did so after securing her promise that she would stay near the village.

"Have you your revolver handy?" he asked, and Ruth laughed at him.

"I have. But I don't expect to be forced to use it."

"Well, you never can tell," answered the young man.

And how wisely he spoke, Ruth was soon to find out.

CHAPTER XVII

TO THE RESCUE

RUTH had not the least intention of disregarding Tom's warning to stay close to the Eskimo village. As a matter of fact, her experience so far in Baffin Land had taught her that it was not safe to take risks in that wild and frozen country.

But the lure of something new to be discovered right around the corner—and of course in the back of Ruth's mind was always the desire to procure a "smashing setting" for her picture—was too strong for her.

She yielded to temptation, and, almost before she knew it, had put a considerable distance between herself and the Eskimo village.

Always, just ahead, there was some new scene to consider and so she moved on and on, taking little note of direction.

"That will do for scene number two hundred and sixteen," she murmured, looking at one entrancing spot. "And it will do for three hun-

dred and four, too; only we'd better take it from the right instead of the left. Oh, but we certainly are going to have some crackajack backgrounds! And everybody will be certain they were taken up here and not down home way or in a studio."

When at last she turned to retrace her steps, what was her bewilderment and dismay to find that she did not know which way to go.

She was not particularly frightened at first. Her sense of orientation was highly developed and she felt certain that eventually she would again hit upon the trail that led to the Eskimo colony.

But her surroundings were so completely strange to her, the various aspects of the country so monotonously alike, that she felt herself completely baffled at every turn.

"Probably every step I take is leading me farther from Tom and the other two," she said aloud, and was startled at the sound of her voice in the deep silence. "But if I stay here it is pretty certain that I shall freeze to death. I wonder what a really wise person would do in such a predicament?"

She floundered along for a few feet further, then came to a standstill, knee deep in snow. For the first time she felt the chill fingers of apprehension clutching at her heart.

What if she were really lost? Alone in these

wastes of snow and ice without even a hard tack biscuit by way of provisions. However, the danger of starvation was rendered insignificant by the far greater menace of the cold. No one could hope to survive long with no shelter from its icy breath.

Already Ruth felt that her feet were becoming numb. It was all she could do to drag them through the drifts. If she had had snowshoes, they might have helped.

Her fingers, even through the fur of the gloves that protected them, were horribly cold. She drew off one of these gloves and touched the icy fingers to her nose. She was relieved to find that this useful member was still occupying its usual position and pulled on the glove again.

She was not frozen yet, but certainly it was necessary to keep moving if she were to fight off the creeping cold.

She had heard of the treacherous drowsiness which precedes death from freezing—who has not?—and she feared that her increasing reluctance to exert herself was the beginning of this symptom.

She braced up, for Ruth Fielding was a fighter, and plunged ahead blindly for a few yards, hoping to stir the half-congealed blood in her veins. She had given up all hope of finding the trail. Her one chance, she reasoned, was to keep herself

alive by hook or by crook until Tom or Chess could find her and take her back to safety.

At last, exhausted, she was forced to rest, and, panting, leaned her numbed body against a tree.

Despairingly, she felt that her will was deserting her. In her heart she knew that she must keep moving constantly, that to give up and sink down into the soft, treacherous blanket of snow would be the beginning of the end of all things for her.

She wavered, hesitated, almost yielded to that urgent desire for rest. At the moment, nothing seemed to matter but that she was tired—so tired!

But the thought of Tom came to her and the thought of her picture, and once more she whipped herself to action.

She had been calling Tom's name constantly in the forlorn hope that he might have followed her—might be within hearing. But now, though she attempted to repeat the call, she could not. Only a harsh croak came from between her stiff lips.

Still she struggled on automatically, flogging her numbed limbs to action. She was half blinded by weakness and the horrible sleepiness that was upon her. Partly for that reason and partly because the trees screened the treacherous slope from her view, Ruth reached the embankment

before she was aware of any danger. When she awoke to her peril it was too late to save herself.

Slipping, grasping wildly at the icy slope, Ruth felt herself flung downward, with no chance to save herself.

The earth rushed up to meet her and she sank deep into the snow, and lay there, inert.

What it was that warned her of a new and more terrible danger, she did not know. That instinct, perhaps, which is born in the subconscious mind which is awake and alert when all our other faculties sleep.

At any rate, the warning of this inner voice was strong enough to arouse Ruth from her fatal stupor, forced her against all her inclinations to struggle to her feet.

Staggering backward, she rubbed the mist from before her eyes. A horrified cry rose to her lips and died there.

Against the opposite bank of the snowy pit in which they, like herself, were imprisoned, crouched two bears, their sullen, small eyes regarding the newcomer who had, literally, fallen into their midst.

A few moments ago Ruth had thought herself numbed to any new sensation. But now she knew herself mistaken, and once more the will to live flared up in her.

She no longer faced death by freezing—but a

far more horrible fate. Those beasts would not remain there, uncertain and suspicious for long. As soon as they had assured themselves of her helplessness, they would become bolder.

With a thrill of added terror she realized that, instead of being white, as had been the polar bears she had glimpsed so far, the fur of these animals was a yellowish, dirty color, made more conspicuous by the background of gleaming white snow.

What had Tom said? Ruth searched her numbed mind for memory of their conversation. Oh, yes! He had said that the yellow polar bear was more ferocious than his pure white cousin—that he would attack an enemy!

Cautiously Ruth looked about her, moving only her eyes as she did so. The same instinct that had warned her of the presence of these enemies, now told her that, to gain time, she must stand rigidly still, hoping by her immobility to baffle the savage beasts.

The sides of the strange pit into which she had fallen were steep and the glazed surface hard and icy. Probably the two bears had found their way into it through curiosity and had not been able to get out so easily.

And now here was she, caught neatly in a trap with two extremely unpleasant fellow victims!

Her roving gaze came back and riveted itself on the bears.

They were still motionless, but there was a menace in that very stillness. They were waiting, obviously, for some move from the girl. Action on her part would relieve uncertainty, relax tense muscles. Ruth knew this, yet knew at the same time that she must act. They could not go on this way forever, with the hope on her part that she might stare the beasts out of countenance.

There was the cartridge belt about her waist and the revolver. But to reach the weapon she must alter her position, though ever so slightly. There was the possibility that her numbed fingers might fumble the weapon, might even drop it in the snow. In that case, there would be an end to Ruth Fielding and all her hopes and aspirations.

There was an impatient movement from one of the great, awkward animals. A low growl and a shambled step forward!

A quiver shot through Ruth, and, swifter than thought, she reached for her revolver.

It was a miracle that she found it, that her almost helpless hand did not lose the cunning that Tom had taught her.

As it was, she was not a moment too soon. Her action frightened the animals and infuriated

them. One of the bears sat up upon its haunches, batting fiercely at the air with one huge forepaw, while the other beast lumbered to the attack.

Ruth felt a sudden weakness in her knees, she could not breathe. If the first shot failed it might mean her life.

"Go away!" she muttered through her stiff lips. "Go away!" And then she pulled the trigger of her weapon, not once but several times.

A first shot went wild and a second hit the oncoming bear in the foreleg. With a roar, it stood up and charged.

With her numbed finger Ruth pressed the trigger again. The beast, not five feet from her, rose into the air as though impelled by some invisible force and fell over on its back. A few ineffectual movements with its clumsy paws, and it lay still. Shot through the brain, it had died instantly.

But Ruth had no time for pride in her marksmanship. The other bear, enraged by the death of its mate, advanced swiftly. With trembling fingers Ruth raised the revolver, leveled it—pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened! Either the weapon was empty or the cartridge had stuck.

The bear was almost upon her. Wildly Ruth looked about her for a means of escape, took a

stumbling step forward, tripped, fell, the revolver hurtling from her hand.

As she fell Ruth cried out hoarsely. She struggled to rise, but could not. The bear was upon her. She could feel its hot breath—

A shout from the bank above—the sharp report of a rifle—once, twice, three times—

Help had come! She was safe!

Ruth, unable to rise, lay there, sobbing, in the snow.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE IGLOO

THERE was the sound of crunching and sliding in the snow. A hand was put upon Ruth's shoulder. She was lifted almost roughly.

"By gar, you pretty near done for dis tam, fo' sure!" said a voice, whose accents were unmistakable.

Anton Delabarre lifted her in his strong arms as though she had been a child, the while he searched the icy face of the slope.

"Anton get down easy, but not so easy get up, I t'ink," he muttered, as though to himself, while Ruth relaxed in his arms, giving way at last to the dreadful drowsiness that assailed her.

Delabarre laid her gently down in the snow, regarding her closed eyes anxiously.

"Dis gal pretty near freeze dis tam, fo' sure," he told himself. "No tam to waste lookin' 'round. Say, you fellers, you dead fo' sure, eh?" He went over to the two bears, kicking their carcasses gently to make sure they would never trouble any one again.

Then he went to the wall of ice, down which he had slid to Ruth's rescue, and dug fingers and toes into its glazed surface, striving for a footing.

This he repeated every few feet about the circumference of the pit, and at last was forced to give in. He shook his head morosely, then lifted up his voice in a hoarse shout.

Only the echoes answered him, and he shouted again, with a back-flung look at Ruth, still in the snow.

Again and again he shouted, and finally there came a reply.

The new voice sounded surprisingly close at hand, and in a short time a man's figure burst through the trees that bordered the pit. It was Tom, his face drawn and haggard with fierce anxiety. He had been worried by Ruth's long absence—had come to find her.

Anton Delabarre greeted him joyfully and pointed to Ruth.

"You just the best man I hope to meet!" he assured him. "Dis leetle lady mus' die you not come soon."

At sight of Ruth lying there as still as death, Tom would have flung himself into the pit, but Delabarre called to him to stay where he was in a voice of sharp authority.

It was then that Tom took in the real situation.

Delabarre could not ascend the slippery bank, and Ruth was powerless to help herself. It was his, Tom's part, to draw them to the safety of the level ground.

How this was to be done they did not know at first, but finally found that by fastening their belts together—Delabarre tossed his up to Tom —Tom, by lying flat on the ground, could deliver the improvised rope into Delabarre's fingers and so help the agile Frenchman to level ground.

But first they drew Ruth up, Delabarre pushing and Tom pulling, until Tom laid her, a pathetic, white-faced bundle, in the snow. It was only a matter of seconds before Delabarre had joined the pair above.

Tom, speaking agitatedly, pointed to the bodies of the two dead bears.

"What have they to do with Ruth's condition?" he asked swiftly. "Is she hurt?"

"I no t'ink," said the trapper, shaking his head. "I t'ink Anton Delabarre he come jus' about de right tam. One bear he get leetle bit rough. She near freeze," he said, with sudden animation as he finished refastening his belt and gripped his rifle. "Get her to Eskimo house pretty queek or she freeze fo' sure."

Tom lifted Ruth tenderly in his arms and started off, following the lead of the Frenchman. He remembered Delabarre's phrase, "One bear

he get leetle bit rough!" and held the girl to him fiercely. What danger might she have been in, might still be in, for all he knew? She lay so still in his arms, almost as though she were dead!

Two hours later Ruth opened her eyes in an atmosphere so hot that it choked her, yet made her strangely comfortable and content. It seemed so long since she had been warm like that!

"Ruthie dear, you know me, don't you?"

It was Helen's voice, and Ruth saw her chum bending anxiously over her.

"Of course I know you!" answered Ruth.

She tried to sit up, and, with the help of Helen's arm about her shoulders, succeeded. It was then that she gazed about her in astonishment.

Not ever having seen the inside of an Eskimo igloo before, her astonishment was perfectly natural. For the Eskimo's house is like none other in the world.

Built entirely of blocks of snow, rolled until they are almost as hard as rock and grooved and fashioned in such a way that they sit firmly, one upon the other, the snow house, for all the chill of the material of which it is made, is a snug and comfortable abode.

Usually, as in this case, it consists of only one room, but a large one. The walls are hung

with skins which serve in a double capacity—for ornament and for added warmth.

There are couches also made of snow and covered with skins and an oil stove upon which bubbles, almost continually, a pot of piping hot stew.

This particular igloo even boasted a phonograph which, while not by any means so uncommon in the far North as one might expect, was, nevertheless, a luxury and a sign of wealth among the natives.

Helen, seeing that Ruth's gaze was fixed upon the phonograph, smiled understandingly.

"It does look strange out here in the wilds, does it not," she said. Then she added, with the hope that it might take Ruth's mind from her recent terrible adventure: "Would you like me to play a tune for you? What shall it be, jazz?"

"I fear I am not quite up to jazz yet," said Ruth indifferently. She was beginning to feel tired again, for the memory of the last few hours had become clear to her partially numbed brain.

"Where is Tom?" she asked, as Helen came and sat down beside her again. "And Chess and Anton Delabarre?" she added, thinking with gratitude of the gallant Frenchman. "I really owe my life to him, you know. Helen, that bear was fairly upon me!"

"I know, honey," said Helen soothingly. "Tom told me all about it. You may be sure Anton Delabarre would never open his mouth about any heroism of his. I think he is wonderful, Ruth."

"After to-day I could not help but think that," said Ruth simply.

It transpired that the men members of the Eskimo family, whose hospitality the two girls enjoyed, had gone off with Delabarre to find the carcasses of the two bears and bring them in.

"To make soup of, I guess," Helen remarked lightly, but Ruth could not laugh. The awful occurrence was still too close.

Delabarre came back shortly and gave a hand to Tom and Chess, who had been inexpertly trying to harness his dog team. Tom was in a fever of eagerness to get Ruth back to the *Ice Bird*, where he could put her under the care of the ship's doctor. The fear haunted him that Ruth had been hurt more badly than she would admit. It was not possible, so he asseverated to the quiet-eyed Delabarre, that any one could come through such an experience without even a scratch to show for it.

"Many tams, young fellow, you will fin' out dat d'impossible t'ing ees not so impossible lak she look," the Frenchman retorted blandly, but still Tom was not satisfied.

The shipward journey was made in much shorter time than the trip to the Eskimo village had been. For, to please Tom and because he also knew that further exposure was not good for Ruth, Delabarre put his noble team upon its mettle, and the great dogs responded loyally to a master they loved.

"Looks lak' big storm," the Frenchman remarked once, as he ran beside his team. "Snowstorm no good jus' now for us fellows."

The others agreed with him, and it was with a feeling of relief that they found themselves at last near Delabarre's cabin. The latter insisted upon driving his team to within a short distance of the *Ice Bird*. Tom and Chess between them carried Ruth the rest of the way.

They thanked the Frenchman heartily for his kindness, and Ruth, for one, was to remember long afterward the wistfulness of his face as they bade him farewell.

In spite of Ruth's protests that she could walk perfectly well, the boys would not let her put foot to the floor until she had reached her stateroom. There they were followed by Mr. Hammond in an anxious frame of mind, and the physician.

The latter pronounced Ruth perfectly sound and declared that a good rest and plenty of

nourishing, hot food would set her up splendidly. She was suffering from shock, nothing else.

"I told you so," Ruth teased Tom, as the physician left. "Do you remember I said you were all spoiling me—making an invalid out of me when I was nothing of the sort?"

"Just the same, from what the boys have told me, I imagine you can stand quite an amount of spoiling," said Mr. Hammond, looking so sincerely anxious that it warmed Ruth's heart.

As he rose to go, Ruth called to him, then, as he turned, flushed as though with embarrassment.

"Are the films all right, Mr. Hammond?" she asked, unable to keep all anxiety from her tone. "Nothing has happened to them?"

"Why, what should happen to them?" asked her former manager, in perplexity. "There has been no fire aboard ship, if that is what you mean."

Ruth turned the matter off with a laugh, but when Mr. Hammond sought his own quarters a few moments later, he was still perplexed.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SNOWSLIDE

A STREAM of people wanted to see Ruth that night and congratulate her on her narrowly escaped peril, but Doctor Jackley said that she must rest, and so denied her the right to see any one but Tom and Helen. And it was not long before Tom himself was sent out of the cabin, leaving the two girls alone. So it was the following morning before Ruth thought that she had not asked Chess what he had done about his uncle's property.

"Everything is fine and dandy and my uncle will be no end pleased," he said, when she had remarked upon this oversight. "It seems that this Delabarre and Briais hold evidence that this property really belongs to him and have passed the proof over to me to be delivered to uncle."

"What he wants with a tract in this wilderness is more than I can see," remarked Helen adding, hopefully: "Unless he would like to stage a good snowball fight, now and then."

"How flippant you are, my dear girl!" said Lasses reprovingly. "I can tell you there is a good deal more to do on this tract of land than throw snowballs. In fact," he added, with the lowered voice of a conspirator, "I have put a proposition to our two fur traders that needs only uncle's O. K. to turn it into a humdinger of a business deal."

"Dear me! How exciting!" cried Helen.

"Do tell us about it, Chess," urged Ruth. "I, at least, am interested."

"Hear grandma talk," said Helen irrepressibly. "You would think she was eighty, at least."

"Not to look at!" retorted Chess gallantly, and Ruth made him a mocking bow.

"That is a comfort!" she conceded, and then Chess went on to tell about the business deal that was to be a "humdinger" if only his uncle consented.

The idea was this. The tract of land owned by his Uncle Jim would yield a rich harvest in animal skins, provided by experienced hunters and trappers.

Chess had thought it a capital plan to put the two Frenchmen, Delabarre and Briais, in charge, promising them a liberal commission on all the furs they traded in.

"Seems to me you are depending a great deal on their honesty," Helen objected. "What is to

prevent these men from keeping the skins, and the money, too?"

"Themselves," answered Chess quietly. "I would rather take the word of those two fellows than the note of lots of people I know."

A day or two later Ruth found that her remark concerning the safety of the films had aroused such curiosity in the mind of Mr. Hammond that he could not rest until he knew the answer.

Finally Ruth told him of her suspicion of the two men, Noggs and Dawson, and of the various peculiar episodes in which they had figured since the start of the journey.

Mr. Hammond was interested and very much annoyed, but he was inclined to take the situation less seriously than Ruth. The men were evidently rascals, so he concluded, but he did not think them capable of engineering such a crime as the theft of Ruth's films and the films of the scientific party.

"At any rate, we will keep a sharp watch upon these fellows, Miss Ruth," he assured the girl, as he rose to go. "From now on the films will be so well guarded that no one short of a magician could gain access to them. I am very glad, however, that you have told me about this."

In spite of the doctor's protest that she ought to allow herself one more day to rest in, Ruth insisted upon taking her company inland that day

for the purpose of taking the last important shot of her picture.

She had found out from Taylor, the man who directed the filming of the scientific pictures, that their work was almost completed, and she was correspondingly eager to finish her own.

They started out early, and by noon had reached location. Ruth was excited, for she knew a great deal depended on these last few lengths of film. In it Anita would have to sustain the reputation she had made for herself during the filming of the play, for here was the most dramatically emotional point in the picture.

Ruth knew that the success of the picture depended, to a great extent, upon the relations existing between her two stars. But, aside from that accidental but all-revealing glimpse she had had of them on that day when she had come across them in the woods, she knew nothing of how affairs now stood between them.

In public they were merely courteous and friendly. But Ruth had noticed that often when they were not engaged in the making of the picture, they stole away together for an hour or two alone. Also, Anita's eyes wore a perpetually dreamy expression, and her mouth smiled contentedly, both signs, Ruth took to be happy ones.

Promptly upon reaching location, Mr. Hooley went to work, getting the cameras ready while

Ruth sought out Anita to have a word with her alone.

Tom noticed that when Ruth came back she was smiling contentedly and he spoke to her about it.

"Something has happened to please you. Can't you tell me about it?" he asked, in the pleading note that he so often used these days.

"As a partner, you have a right to know all my inmost thoughts—at least, those related to business," Ruth replied, smiling at him. "I was merely congratulating myself—us, I should say —on the fact that Anita Townsend is playing the lead in this picture. Do you know, Tom," she added, suddenly animated, "that Anita is as crazy about this last scene as a child is on Christmas morning for its stocking? Says she has been looking forward to it all through the picture. I feel certain that she will interpret the scene exactly as I meant it to be interpreted. No wonder I look happy!"

"Oh, Anita is all right. But that leading man of ours—"

"He is all right, too," said Ruth, quite decidedly adding, with an air of mystery: "You just wait and see!"

Tom waited and, furthermore, he saw that Ruth was right. Grand was in his very best form. And that was saying a good deal, for the man was

a really able actor. And as for Anita, her portrayal of Gloria, the girl who forswears all safe and comfortable things to follow the man she loves through the dangers and hardships of the arctic country, sacrificing herself rather than that he should give up the only life he knows, was so passionately realistic that even Hooley forgot for a while that he was making pictures.

It was a genuine triumph for them all, and after the work was done, Ruth sent her company back to the *Ice Bird* without her.

Tom stayed behind also, and together the two watched the fur-clad figures. Then Tom turned to Ruth and smiled, holding out his hand.

"Congratulations, Ruthie," he said. "You have done many fine things, but this, in my estimation, caps them all."

Ruth took the proffered hand and flashed him a smile full of the triumph she felt at that moment.

"It was good, wasn't it, Tom?" she said softly. "If only the distributers—and the public—will like it as well as we do!"

"They can't help it, Ruth. That picture has an appeal for everyone, young or old, rich or poor. If any distributer turns it down it will simply be a commentary on his bad taste. And you take my word for it—the public will eat it up!"

Ruth looked at him, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, feet planted far apart in the snow, and was conscious of a very gentle feeling for dear old Tom. So reliable, and always on the spot when she needed him.

He was taking a very real interest in the moving picture business too, and Ruth realized that his temperament was particularly well suited to an occupation of that sort. He was doing splendidly and, in her heart, this pleased Ruth mightily. For some time she had thought that Tom might turn out to be one of those objectionable members of society—a rich man's son who thought it entirely unnecessary to work for a living. But since that time, Tom had changed—immensely.

At this moment the young fellow, who had been staring vaguely ahead of him, must have felt Ruth's gaze upon him and sensed something of her thoughts, for he turned to her and took an eager step toward her.

"I am still worked up about the picture," Ruth explained, after a little time had passed. "And only a good long walk will remove the pressure."

"A snow fight might help," said Tom, but Ruth laughed this suggestion to scorn.

"A snow fight, indeed!" she scoffed. "Imagine the two members of the firm of Fielding Film Company, Incorporated, indulging in anything so

childish as a snow fight. A pretty sight that would be!"

"I can imagine lots worse ones," retorted Tom, with a grin.

They walked for a considerable distance and came at last to a curious spot that claimed their interest. It was a sharp, icy incline, worn smooth as glass and terminating in the water.

"A seal toboggan," said Tom, gleefully. "Got the chutes at Coney Island beat to a frazzle."

Rashly he stepped out upon the glassy incline, and Ruth cried out sharply:

"Tom, come back! You will fall! Come back!"

She was too late. Tom lost his footing, slipped and slid down the icy incline, toward the water below.

CHAPTER XX

HALF FROZEN

RUTH looked for Tom to catch himself at the foot of the slope, for the incline curved upward for a foot or two at that point, before plunging into the water. It should have been possible for one as strong and agile as Tom to save himself.

But Tom did not even try. He fell solidly, with a terrifying splash, into the water.

For a moment Ruth could neither move nor think. Paralyzed with horror, she gazed upon the spot where Tom had disappeared.

He would come up in a moment. Tom could swim like a fish.

But he did not come up!

This fact was the only spur to action Ruth needed. The side of the bank was steep and almost as slippery as the slide itself, but Ruth scrambled down it, digging fingers and toes into the hard surface, at every moment herself in imminent danger of falling into the half-frozen water.

But she did not think of herself. Tom was in danger! If she did not do something to help him quickly, Tom might die. What did anything matter beside this terrifying possibility?

She reached the bottom after an interminable period, that was really only a second or two, and edged along to the spot where Tom had disappeared.

Why had he not come up? Without stopping to think, without considering the danger to herself of such an action, Ruth dropped into the water, cutting it in a clean dive.

It seemed to Ruth that, as the icy water closed over her, she instantly congealed into ice herself. She must find Tom quickly or not at all—instinct told her that.

Her hand struck against something. It was Tom, lying there, inert.

Her lungs were bursting! She must have air!

Battling her way to the surface, she filled her tortured lungs and dived again. This time she caught Tom—managed with the exertion of all her strength, to drag him to the surface.

It was lucky for Ruth—and Tom, too,—that her many adventures and life in the open and in this cold North had hardened her muscles. Even six months ago she could not have done what she did now.

At the point where she had come up there was

a projecting arm of the shore, ice-covered and slippery, to be sure, but a lifesaver to Ruth.

She managed to push and drag Tom, limp and apparently lifeless, until he was half upon this projection. Then slowly and painfully, Ruth drew herself up upon the snow.

She lay there for a moment, gaining strength for the still greater effort of dragging Tom's dead weight from the water.

Why did Tom lie so limp and still? He could not be dead?

The thought flogged her to action, nearly exhausted as she was. If Tom were not dead, he might be if she failed to get help to him soon!

Calling on her reserve strength, she dragged Tom further up on the bank. She knelt beside him, shaking him and calling him by name.

Beneath the thick clothing he wore she could not tell whether or not his heart still beat. She tried to unbutton his jacket, but her fingers were too numb and stiff.

"A fire, a fire! If I could only get a fire!" she muttered over and over again, then realized, suddenly, how futile was this wish. Even considering the doubtful possibility that she could drag Tom up the steep slope unaided and find the fuel for a fire, they had no matches.

Tom might have some in an inner pocket, but how could that help her when her fingers were so

numb she could not unbutton his coat? Then, too, they had probably become sodden with water, and were useless.

As she bent over Tom, trying in desperation to shake him back to consciousness, Ruth saw something on her hand—something that looked like a great, white, frozen tear.

A snow flake. Snowing then! An arctic blizzard perhaps! And she out here with Tom, unable to help him, unable to do a thing to save him.

It was characteristic of Ruth that the thought did not once occur to her that there might still be time to save herself. She did not even think of herself.

Because she felt a frantic need for action of some sort, Ruth started dragging Tom along the shore.

She had no idea how far they had come—only that they had walked rapidly, reveling in their own youth and good health and the nip of the frosty air. Therefore, she could not guess how far it would be necessary to drag her inert burden before they might hope for aid from the *Ice Bird*.

No one would start out for them. They had not been gone long enough for that. And those aboard the vessel knew too well Ruth's enjoyment of long hikes with Tom for the company to

be alarmed by anything but a prolonged absence.

She could go on no further. Her strength was at an end, her hands and feet numb with cold, her sodden clothing seeming to encase her in an icy sheath.

The snow flakes were coming faster and the wind was rising, giving every sign of a fierce storm. In an hour they would be snowed under, lost. Not even a searching party could hope to find them then.

Ruth sank to her knees beside Tom and pushed back the fur cap that still clung to his head. It was then she noticed the bruise on his forehead.

He had struck his head when he fell, had undoubtedly been unconscious when he struck the water. That was the reason that he had not tried to save himself.

"Oh, Tom, I must do something for you—something!" murmured the distracted girl. It was then that she noticed that the tears were raining down her face, though she was not conscious of crying.

As though her voice had drawn him back from those remote regions of unconsciousness where his soul had been hovering, Tom opened his eyes.

He moved feebly and Ruth cried out in sudden hope.

"Tom—I thought—I thought—" She did not

finish the sentence, for Tom was struggling to sit up.

She helped him, a hand behind his shoulders. Tom rubbed a frozen glove across his forehead.

"Pretty cold!" he muttered, and Ruth seized him by the shoulders, shaking him to a more immediate realization of his surroundings.

"Tom, you must try to exert yourself. If you don't you will freeze!" she cried urgently. "It is snowing! Tom—look! We must get away from here."

The critical nature of their predicament penetrated at last the fog of bewilderment in Tom's mind. He struggled to his feet and stood unsteadily, supported by Ruth's arm.

"Hit my head on something when I fell," he muttered. "Must have gone into the water."

"You did!" from Ruth.

"But who hauled me out? You couldn't."

"I did, Tom. There was no one else!"

"You mean to say that a girl like you—"

"Oh, please, Tom, don't let us go into that now. We have no time—"

"You hauled me out of that water all by yourself—a girl like you?" persisted Tom doggedly, and Ruth turned to look straight into his half-dazed eyes.

"Won't you stop talking about it, Tom, and

help me?" she begged. "I must get you back to the ship."

Probably nothing could have been more of a whip to Tom's lagging senses than that last sentence of Ruth's. She was going to get him back to the ship when he himself should have been finding the way out of their all-but-hopeless position.

He took her arm and Ruth rejoiced at the old masterfulness of his touch. Tom was himself once more, and nothing else seemed to matter.

But, as a matter of fact, Tom, despite his assumption of strength, was still giddy and weak from his fall. His clothing, like Ruth's, was frozen, hampering his movements horribly.

They struggled on for an endless time, Tom pretending to take the lead while it was Ruth who really did so, not knowing where they went, or how far, only certain that they must not stop.

They tried to find their way back by the half-beaten path by which they had come, but the snow seemed to have obliterated all signs of it.

"We are lost, Tom! To find our way back would be almost a miracle," Ruth whispered once, and Tom could find no comforting answer. The truth of her statement was too obvious.

The snow swirled about them, formed into treacherous drifts into which they stumbled blindly. Once Ruth fell and could not struggle up again. Tom helped her to her feet, and they

stood there for a moment, clinging together, seemingly the only two living creatures in a world of ice and snow.

"It is getting worse and worse," said Ruth, in a voice oddly deadened by the thick-falling curtain of snow. "We can't go on much farther."

"Wait!" commanded Tom harshly. "What was that I heard?"

They listened, not daring to breathe.

It came to them, then, softened by distance and the storm, but distinct and clear, nevertheless —a faint, "Hulloo."

Tom's voice rang out through the stillness, hoarse and loud, in answer.

CHAPTER XXI

STEALTHY FOOTSTEPS

THE sound of that voice calling to them across the waste of snow and ice, assured Ruth Fielding and Tom Cameron that human sympathy and help was near. They clung to each other in blessed relief for a moment, then, stumbling forward again, calling out every little while and receiving an answering shout, Ruth and Tom made in the direction of the newcomers.

"Do you suppose they are from the *Ice Bird?*" Ruth asked, pausing for a moment to gain her breath.

"I don't know. But it doesn't matter much, so long as they are human and can help us out of this," said Tom grimly. "Oh, Ruth, only think what you have been through just because I had no more sense than to knock myself on the head!"

"I don't suppose you did it on purpose," replied Ruth, gently. "Especially when you almost lost your own life as a result of it."

"I have a right to do as I please with my own life," retorted Tom. "But I have no right to risk yours. What is the matter?" he added, as she halted for a moment. "Tired?"

"Yes, of course. But my feet feel so queer," said Ruth. "Like toy balloons with nothing but air in them."

Tom gave her a sharp look and shouted again at the top of his lungs.

This time the answer was so close at hand that they were able to recognize it. It was, as Ruth and Tom had both hoped, Chess Copley's voice. It was only a moment then before the two parties met.

Ruth saw with amazement and gratitude that Helen Cameron made one of the searching party. Mr. Hammond had with him two of the sailors, who knew the country thereabouts and had, presumably, acted as guides.

Ruth and Helen fell into each other's arms, and the next moment Tom came in for an embrace from his greatly relieved sister.

"What do you two mean, getting lost in the snow and scaring us almost to death?" she cried roundly. "We have been hunting for you for more than an hour."

"Being lost in the snow was not the worst of our troubles, at that, was it Ruth?" said Tom,

and, on the spot, Helen demanded to know what he meant by that.

But Mr. Hammond, after one sharp glance at the two young people, would permit no further questioning just then.

"What you both need is a good hot fire and a bowl of soup apiece," he told them. "Hurry up, Leopold," he said to one of the sailors. "Get these two people back to the ship as quickly as you can."

It proved that they were only a short distance from the *Ice Bird*. Ruth and Tom had evidently taken the right direction, quite by chance, of course, and might even, provided their strength had held out, have eventually reached the ship without help.

It was some little time before they thawed out sufficiently to give any detailed account of their perilous adventure to the highly curious Helen and Chess.

Ruth would have preferred not to mention her part in the happening, particularly in that part of it that dealt with her heroism in rescuing Tom. But the latter, being more grateful than ever after he had learned the full extent of the service Ruth had rendered him, was anxious that every one should have the story.

"You mean that you actually dived into that icy water to rescue Tom?" cried Helen. "Why,

Ruth, that must have taken more courage than I ever dreamed of!"

"Oh, nonsense," Ruth protested uncomfortably. "You would have done the same thing if you had been in my shoes; you know you would. What could I do—let Tom drown?"

"But how did you know that when you came up after your dive you would not find yourself under a block of ice, or something of the sort?" persisted Helen, still filled with a boundless admiration of Ruth's heroism. "You would have had a pretty time swimming out in that case!"

"One doesn't stop to think of such things at a time like that," said Ruth simply. "I imagine if I had stopped to think I would have run back to the *Ice Bird* for help."

"And much good the help would have done Tom by the time it reached him!" observed Chess, and Tom made a rueful grimace.

"Reckon I would have been food for the little fishes by then," he said.

"That was a cheering remark, I must say," observed Helen tartly. "If you cannot say something pleasant when you speak, Tommy-boy, better not speak at all."

"Is that the way you treat a brother just restored to your arms?" asked Tom, but Chess laughingly intervened.

"Far be it from me to spoil a little family

scrap," he said. "But, really, Tom, I am being rapidly consumed by curiosity. What kind of a slide or chute or thingamajig was this you skated down to-day?"

"Thinking of trying it yourself?" asked Helen flippantly, but Chess threw her a solemn look.

"If I should, I bet you would not risk your life for me," he accused, and Helen looked thoughtful.

"That would all depend on what I happened to be wearing at the time," she said.

Tom shouted and Chess turned to him, turning his back definitely upon his exceedingly frivolous fiancée.

"I repeat my question, Tom? What kind of thing was this that came near to proving your Waterloo?"

"A seal slide, I guess," said Tom. "I never saw one before, but I have heard about them lots of times, as I guess you all have."

"That is a sort of skating pond for the seal family, especially the baby ones, is it not?" queried Helen, with the air of one seeking knowledge.

"More of a sliding pond, I should say," corrected Tom soberly. "I don't imagine that papa seal provides his children with skates."

"Dear little things," laughed Helen. "Can't

you just see them sliding down on their flippers? Such a graceful sight."

"No more so than Tom, I bet," said Chess, but Ruth could not bring herself to join in the laugh with the others. The picture of Tom, sliding down that icy incline to almost certain death in the icy waters below was still too fresh in her memory to permit of joking.

That night Ruth was once more wakened from a sound sleep.

She lay still, shivering with dread of she knew not what, thinking that she must have had a bad dream and was still under the spell of it.

She could hear nothing save the washing of the water against the sides of the ship. All was as still as death, yet she had that strange certainty that comes to almost every one at one time or another of a sinister presence hovering near.

Suddenly she heard it—the noise of stealthy footsteps passing her door.

She leapt from her bed and ran to the door, more angry than alarmed this time. These strange night disturbances were becoming altogether too frequent!

She opened her door quietly and looked out into the corridor.

At the slight creak accompanying the action, a figure, hurrying off, paused to look back over its

shoulder, then hurried on, to be lost the next moment in the shadows.

Ruth closed the door quietly again and turned the key in the lock, her heart pounding violently.

Noggs again! She had not seen his face, but his figure was unmistakable.

"What is the matter, Ruthie?" asked Helen's sleepy voice through the darkness. "Have you a pain, or are you just walking in your sleep?"

CHAPTER XXII

GONE!

THAT night Ruth slept once more close to Helen, glad of her companionship and sympathy.

As Jennie Stone Marchand would have expressed it, had she been present, Ruth was a victim of the horrors.

At the moment when Noggs turned and looked at her over his shoulder in the dusky corridor, she had been conscious of a haunting premonition of disaster. Upon being questioned, she had told Helen the bare facts of the thing, but had said nothing of her mental depression. However, Helen had sensed this and was, in consequence, warmly sympathetic and reassuring.

But, try as she would, even in the grey dawn of the following morning, Ruth could not shake off the conviction that some unusual and appalling thing was about to happen.

Knowing that this state of mind was a morbid one, she did her best to conquer it. She had exacted a promise from Helen that she would

say nothing of this new development to Tom and Chess and knew that she could trust her chum implicitly.

"Though why you should insist upon taking such a gloomy view of it, honey, I cannot see," said the latter, in one last attempt to rouse Ruth from her "slough of despond." "If those rascals have not been able to accomplish the destruction of your films by this time, I do not believe they ever will. Why, Ruthie, in that safe of Mr. Hammond's those films are as safe as though they were in a church."

"I wish I were sure of that," Ruth had returned, and, try as she would, Helen could not get another word from her on the subject.

In her own mind, Ruth was convinced that she would be very lucky if she were to get the films back to the States in safety. Consequently, she was feverishly eager to start on the return journey.

"Pretty nearly through, aren't we, Ruth?" asked Tom, a day or two later, as Ruth finished a conference with Mr. Hooley. "Time to be starting home pretty soon, isn't it?"

"Oh, I wish it were!" cried Ruth fervently, then, seeing that Tom was surprised by her vehemence, strove to regain her habitual calm of manner.

"I am anxious to give 'Snowblind' to the dis-

tributers," she went on, more calmly. "I feel, Tom, I really feel, that it is the best I have done yet. If the picture is a success a great deal of the credit will be due you, Tom," she added.

Tom flushed with pleasure, though he disclaimed with becoming modesty any merit on his part.

"You have done it, Ruth. Yours are the artistic brains of the thing," he told her. "All I have done was to attend to the business details and handle the financial end of things."

"All of which is a greater help than you know," Ruth assured him earnestly. "I would go mad if I had to attend to all those things as well as to write and direct the pictures. So you see, you are really a very important person, Mr. Tom Cameron."

There followed a bit of conversation which Tom strove in vain to make personal, and finally he swung around to his original question.

"But we are nearly through, aren't we?"

"All but a retake or two I have set my heart on," Ruth replied. "There was a scene between Anita and Grand in the earlier part of the picture that did not suit me. I want to bring that up to the level of the closing scenes."

"Speaking of Anita and Grand," said Helen, coming up behind them and overhearing part of Ruth's explanation: "You have certainly done

wonders with those two, Ruth. Won't you tell me how you managed it?"

"Some time, maybe," said Ruth teasingly, for this was not the first time Helen had sought to quiz her concerning the change in the mutual attitude of her stars. "There will not be time just now, Helen dear. I really must hurry ashore for that retake."

"You are an aggravating old thing, and I am very much put out with you," Helen called after her, and Ruth's only answer was a still more tantalizing laugh.

Although everything seemed propitious for the retake—Anita and Grand being not only willing but eager to do once again their work in that part of the play—Ruth was anxious and worried.

The sky was overcast, for one thing, and there was a haze in the air that prophesied snow. Although the storm that had overtaken them a few days before had been merely a "teaser," Ruth knew that any day might find them in the grip of a genuine blizzard.

This would not only make the taking of pictures practically impossible, but it would, of necessity, delay their return to the States for some time to come.

Considering that Ruth's most fervent desire at that time was to make that return journey as

soon as possible, one may easily understand why she watched the sky with such anxiety.

And always, even in the midst of the absorbing work of directing the picture, the figure of Noggs, squat and sinister, floated before her eyes.

Noggs and Dawson, so far baffled and kept at bay, would not consent much longer to be thwarted in their evil designs. Some sixth sense warned Ruth that whatever they intended to do they would do quickly, knowing that they had very little time longer in which to act.

Toward noon the first snow flakes began to fall.

Ruth, overwrought as she was, would have ordered an immediate return to the ship, but Tom laughed at her fears and finally succeeded in persuading her to finish the retake before the return.

It was probably because Ruth herself so keenly desired the completion of the retake that she finally gave in to him.

Anita and Grand were working magnificently. There was no telling whether they would ever again be able to play the scene in just that way.

Yet Ruth was glad, disproportionately glad, when the scene was finished and she could order a hasty retreat to the ship.

They had been forced to travel a considerable distance inland for the retake, and this fact added to Ruth's anxiety.

"It will take us a long time to get back, Tom," she confided to her partner, as they turned to go. "And the storm is getting worse every moment. Listen to that wind! A blizzard!"

"Sure is," agreed Tom cheerfully. "Shouldn't wonder if we had struck the genuine article this time. Mighty lucky we were able to finish the scene Ruth. And, say, it was a corker!"

Ruth looked at him wonderingly, amazed that he could take the situation so lightly. But, of course, she thought quickly, he knew nothing of Noggs's mysterious nocturnal wanderings. He knew nothing of her premonitions, would probably have laughed at them if he had known—or, at least, would have pretended to laugh at them for the sake of reassuring her.

"Let us hurry, Tom," she cried impatiently, annoyed at their forcedly slow pace through the drifting snow. "We have still so far to go!"

"We are getting there all right. Now don't worry, Ruth," Tom said in his matter-of-fact, reassuring tone. "We are all used to roughing it—even Anita!"

Ruth brushed the snow from her eyes in order to get a clearer view of her star.

Anita was floundering through the snow in company with Grand and the latter's attitude toward his leading lady was protective—if not

possessive. Ruth allowed herself a small, secretive smile.

With a feeling of immense relief the party came at last to familiar ground, reached that part of the shore from which the *Ice Bird* could usually be seen, riding easily at anchor.

Suddenly Ruth gripped Tom's arm and pointed with a shaking finger out to sea.

"Look!" she cried. "It is gone! The *Ice Bird* is gone!"

CHAPTER XXIII

LOST IN THE STORM

THE *Ice Bird* was gone!

The members of her company repeated the words dully as they gathered about Ruth to gaze in the direction she pointed out.

The wind, risen to a gale, bit fiercely at them, beating the snow into their faces with a force that half blinded them. Yet they could see that Ruth was right. There was no sign of the ship.

Suddenly Chess called out hoarsely, pointing far out to sea where a vessel bobbed helplessly in the drifting ice.

"There she is!" he cried. "Broken loose from her moorings and caught in the drifting ice. Now we sure are in a fine fix!"

The members of Ruth's company who, after the first wondering exclamations, had been silent and awed by the catastrophe, broke into excited chattering. Some of the women began to wail in terror and Ruth and Mrs. Johnson went among them, quieting them and doing their best to reas-

sure them. This was no easy task for Ruth for she was in great need of reassurance, herself.

Helen made her way through the half-hysterical group and stood beside Ruth. For once adventure had lost its tang for Helen. She stood with knitted brows, gazing out toward the helpless *Ice Bird.*

"What do you suppose we can do now, Ruth?" she asked, in a carefully lowered voice that could not reach the others. "This is about the worst scrape we have ever been in, I imagine."

Ruth nodded. Her gaze, like Helen's, was fixed on the drifting *Ice Bird.*

"I knew something dreadful was going to happen. I have felt it all day!" she muttered, thinking aloud. But when Helen, puzzled, asked her to repeat what she had said, Ruth turned upon her fiercely, gripping her arm with fingers that hurt.

"Do you realize that my films are aboard that ship, Helen? I may never see them again."

"You do not mean to say you are thinking of films at a time like this, Ruth Fielding!" cried Helen, looking at her in amazement. "Don't you know that if we cannot find some way to get the *Ice Bird,* we may all starve to death out here—if we don't freeze first?"

"I would rather starve or freeze than lose my

films," answered Ruth morosely, and at that Helen turned away.

She went up to Chess who, with Tom, had broken away from the crowd and were approaching them, their faces serious.

"I don't know what we are going to do next, Ruth—"

"Move—and keep on moving!" Ruth interrupted Chess, with a sudden flare of energy. "We will try to reach the cabins of Delabarre and Briais before the drifts become too deep. And listen, boys," she added, speaking rapidly, "we must do our best to be cheerful and encouraging, so as to reassure the rest. And we *must* keep them moving. It is getting deadly cold, and we cannot afford to waste time."

After one wistful, longing glance in the direction of the drifting and helpless *Ice Bird,* the party started off in the direction of Delabarre's cabin, headed by Ruth and Tom.

They were an exceedingly anxious crowd. The women of the party said but little, but several of the men grumbled openly.

"Nice fix to be in!" said one of the minor actors. "Looks to me as if our goose was cooked."

"Better say frozen," returned one of the others, with grim humor. "Gee, I'm chilled to the very marrow of my bones!"

They had gone only a short distance when all realized what great need there was for haste. The lowering sky had become still more ominously dark, turning the day into a heavy twilight. The snow fell thickly, piling up into great drifts under the fierce driving force of the wind. It enclosed them like a wall, made them feel as though they were continually walking through a solid substance. More than once Ruth made as though to brush the fleecy veil aside, only to be angered by the futility of the gesture.

Sometimes she and Tom stopped, went back and rounded up some lagging members of the company, making sure that, so far, every one was safe.

Hooley and his assistants struggled manfully on with the cameras, relieved now and then by other male members of the company. Ruth talked to them, impressing upon them the necessity of saving the films at all cost, cheering them with the assurance that they would soon reach warmth and shelter.

Then she would struggle back to Tom and they would go on again—on—on—

At last she stopped, brushed the snow from her lashes and looked up steadily into Tom's face.

"There is something wrong, Tom," she said

slowly. "We should have reached Delabarre's cabin long ago."

Soberly Tom returned her look.

"I know that," he said. "I have not wanted to tell you, for fear—oh, well, I knew you would find out for yourself, anyway!"

"Tom, Tom, what do you mean? Tell me quickly. Oh, never mind!" she added, composing herself with an effort, "I know what you mean. I have known at the back of my mind all along. We are lost!"

"I am afraid so, Ruth. It would be almost impossible, even for a trained woodsman to keep the trail in a storm like this. It was impossible for us."

"But, Tom, what shall we do? We must do something!"

Others of the forlorn band had come up and now demanded apathetically what the matter was.

Ruth started on again, automatically, floundering knee deep through the drifts. Tom overtook her, seized her arm.

"Ruth, rest a moment," he begged. "You will tire yourself out this way."

Ruth impatiently shook off his detaining hand.

"We must go on, Tom. We must not let the others know. They—those women back there—would go all to pieces. We must keep them

moving, keep them hopeful. It is our only chance."

But it was not possible to keep that miserable band cheerful and hopeful for long. While they believed Ruth led them on to warmth and shelter, they were content to suffer hardship for the sake of the relief that would come later.

But the time came when they demanded to know how much further they must struggle on before reaching the shelter promised them. Ruth put them off at first, and, when she could no longer do this, told them the truth, urging them, for her sake, to keep up their courage.

Probably no other argument would have had such effect as this one. For Ruth's whole company from the stars down to the humblest extra, were devoted to her. Furthermore, they had implicit faith in her ability to extricate them from any predicament, no matter how serious it might seem at the time.

But Ruth knew very well that once the real hardship began, once they began to feel the pangs of hunger or the bitter, unbearable cold of the arctic night, all their devotion to her would go for nothing.

She knew that Grand and Anita Townsend would stand the test like thoroughbreds, but she could not, dared not, answer for the rest.

Ages more of struggling onward toward an

invisible goal, while the freezing wind cut through their clothing and the snow swirled in deeper drifts about them, impeding their progress, almost halting them at times.

Once Helen, brushing against Ruth, reached out a hand and clung to her.

"Ruth, it is getting near night," she gasped. "We never can stand the hideous cold of these Northern nights. In the morning we shall all be dead."

"Nonsense!" cried Chess, overhearing the last of this. He put an arm about the girl and urged her on again. "By morning we shall all be safe and warm somewhere. Come on!"

At last came the time when Ruth and Tom were faced by the terrible conviction that they could not go much further. They two alone, or with Helen and Chess, might struggle on for a little longer but there were members of the company who could not.

Some of the women had collapsed and were being practically carried along by the men of the party. Little Anita Townsend, with all her pluck, had fallen into a snowdrift a short way back and had been unable to rise. Since then she had been cradled in the arms of Grand, who bore her as lightly as though she had been a feather.

But with the added burden of the exhausted

women, even the men could not hope to keep on much longer.

Ruth and Tom had never spoken of it, but it had tacitly been agreed between them that they would not desert the company. Feeling full responsibility for the safety of those in their employ, they felt that if they could not help the latter to safety, they must not try for it themselves. In short, they must stand or fall with the company, much as a captain casts in his lot with that of his ship.

Nevertheless, Tom strove to argue with Ruth on this point.

"Go on with Chess and Helen," he urged her. "Unhampered, you may be able to find help. I will stay with the company and do the best I can do for them, though heaven knows there is precious little I can do!"

But he might have been arguing with a stone wall, as far as Ruth was concerned.

"Anyway, if I could find it in my heart to leave my people, do you suppose I could leave you, Tom?" she asked, with a finality that permitted of no further argument.

Nor could Helen and Chess be persuaded to go on alone. They would stand or fall together; though, as Helen added, with a faint attempt at humor, it looked like a "pretty bad spill for them all."

Night came down, and with it went their last hope. The wind had died away, but the snow fell steadily, relentlessly.

Some of the company, no longer able to stagger onward, had fallen in the snow and were already half-covered with the chill white blanket.

Ruth, looking at them, felt something snap in her brain. She turned and floundered into the night, not knowing where she went, or caring.

"They will die, all of them, and I am responsible!" she moaned. "If I had not insisted upon taking that last shot!"

CHAPTER XXIV

STARVING

RUTH felt a grip upon her shoulders and, looking up, saw Tom—or a shadow she supposed was Tom.

"Ruth, where are you going? What are you going to do?" he asked. "Are you crazy?"

"Just about, Tom, I guess. I cannot stay there and—see them like that and know that I am responsible. Let me go!"

She wrenched herself free of his grip, and as she did so, stumbled and fell against something hard.

She pulled herself up, felt the surface she had struck against.

"Tom, Tom, I can hardly believe it!" she cried. "But it is—I think it is—a snow house—an igloo! Come here quickly and tell me if I am right! Oh, hurry!"

There was scarcely need to urge Tom to haste. He was at her side in a moment, had circled the mysterious object that loomed white against the blackness of the night.

He was gone a long while, it seemed to Ruth, but she had not the strength to follow him.

He came back, calling to her in a voice hoarse with hope.

"It is an igloo, Ruth. A deserted one, but it is warm inside. We will go and tell those half-frozen people—"

But Ruth was already gone, stumbling, gasping, fighting her way through drifts to her company, who were dying out there in the snow.

Tom came up to her as she stumbled into the midst of them.

She sank to her knees among them, telling them in a voice that was choked with joy and renewed hope that they were safe, safe—she and Tom had found shelter for them.

"Just a little way—it is just a little way," she cried to them, springing to her feet and pointing into the darkness. "You have strength enough to go that far. Get up, get up, all of you! Hurry, please!"

Strange, the strength hope brings! A few moments before those men and women believed they had done as much as they could do, had felt the treacherous lassitude creeping over them that cries out only for rest.

Yet now a measure of strength returned to their half-frozen bodies. The men got to their feet, helping the women to rise also.

Leading them on, encouraging them, herself reeling with fatigue and exposure, Ruth went ahead to show them the way. Tom would have helped her, but she did not seem to need his help. For Ruth Fielding was made of the stuff that does not yield while there is still work to be done.

They found the igloo, stumbled around to the low door leading into it.

Tom bent his head and led the way, striking a match as he did so. There was a tallow candle on the rough table in the center of the room, and he lit that also.

The party of castaways herded into the warm place, making strange little clucking noises as the mild air greeted them.

They sprawled upon the crude furniture, upon the floor where there was nothing else, half dead, hardly knowing where they were or what they did, waiting for the milder air to revive them and quicken their numbed senses.

Helen had slumped down upon a snow couch, and Chess was gently pulling off her gloves. Tom would have done the same for Ruth but she waved him aside.

"Not yet, Tom," she said, with a twisted smile. "I must see more of this new house and what is in it."

They found, to their dismay, that there was little in it. The Eskimos who had built it and

lived in it had evidently packed most of their belongings and started out for a different home site. At least, they had left nothing but a ragged skin that hung over the entrance of the place and a small amount of oil which, used with caution in their oil stove, would suffice to keep them warm, for a short time at least.

"We will need it, too," Ruth said to Tom, as they examined this last discovery. "It really is not very warm in here, Tom. It was only contrast with the bitter cold outside that made it seem so. And, oh, Tom, what shall we do without food? As far as I can see, we are very little better off than we were before, except that we shall not freeze to death."

"Nor starve, either, while I have my trusty rifle by my side," said Tom, with a grin he strove to make cheerful. "We fellows will go out hunting in the morning and bring you back a bear for lunch."

"Unless we find ourselves snowed in," said Ruth so softly that Tom could not hear her, and when he asked her to repeat it she would not.

A miserable night passed, despite the fact that they had found shelter from the storm—and most miserable for Ruth, who never closed her eyes during the long, black hours.

In the morning the snow had stopped, but

the sky was gloomy and threatening, prophesying another storm.

Tom got the men together and spoke to them in low tones. Ruth knew that he was telling them of the necessity of hunting their food, if they were not to starve.

They left presently, their rifles cocked and ready, while the women folk silently watched them go.

"I do not believe they will bring home anything, Ruth," said Helen, as she sat beside her chum, hand locked in hers. "They know nothing of this country, and few of them have had any experience in hunting."

"I wish Anton Delabarre were here," said Ruth wistfully. "I believe he would help us." Then she added, as her grip on Helen's hand tightened: "They must bring us something, Helen! They must!"

But they did not.

Noon came, and with it the men, dispirited and disheartened. The party had gone many hours without food now, and their courage was deserting them.

The men had scoured the neighborhood, so they said, but had seen nothing that was worth a shot. They went out again that afternoon, however, and both Ruth and Helen insisted upon going with them. The other women of the party

were listless and apathetic, seeming not to care very much what happened to them.

The hunters returned empty-handed again that night. They were all nearly ready to give up, even Ruth. Hunger is a great destroyer of courage, and they were beginning to experience the first real pangs of famine.

Another night passed, far more miserable than the first had been, and another day dawned, grey and cheerless. The men went forth again in the desperate hope of wresting food from the barren country. But Ruth noticed that they staggered as they walked.

"This cannot go on much longer," Ruth said to Helen as, white-faced, they stared at each other.

"We must get food—some sort of food today—or, Helen, I cannot bear to think of it!"

"Then don't, my dear. I myself have come to the point where the idea of chewing on shoe leather is not so obnoxious to me," said Helen, moodily. "Ruth," she added, after a moment of hesitation, "I cannot help wondering whether the wind was wholly responsible for the *Ice Bird's* breaking away from her moorings."

Ruth looked at her, startled, and slowly a flush spread over her white face.

"You mean, you think it was set adrift?" she almost whispered. "You were thinking of—Noggs."

"I was thinking of Noggs," returned Helen, grimly.

"Then," said Ruth, in a dead voice, "I will never see my films again!"

The boys came back about noon. Those inside the igloo heard them talking as they came, and there was something queerly elated about the way they called to each other. Ruth and Helen exchanged glances, not daring to hope.

Tom was the first to appear. He was weak from hunger but ablaze with a queer excitement. He flung down a bundle before Ruth, and with trembling fingers she opened it.

"Meat! Bear meat!" shrilled Ruth, and immediately there was a rush upon her. Ruth had to guard the contents of the package from eager, clutching fingers.

"Not now," she cried, her eyes gleaming with a feverish excitement. "We will have it in the regular way in a few minutes. Light the stove, boys, light the stove!"

The smell of that sizzling, frying meat—there were a few rusted cooking utensils among the meager furnishings of the igloo, and the girls found a frying pan among these—set them all half crazy. They would not let it cook done, but fell upon it like ravenous animals while it was so rare that the blood still dripped from it.

Ruth did not have to caution them not to eat

too much, for there was barely enough to go around. But, even at that, what a different world it was as they all sat about the stove, shamelessly licking the last drops of bear grease from their fingers.

It was only then that Ruth and some of the others betrayed curiosity as to how this magical gift had come into their hands.

"We ran into some Eskimos on our way back here," Tom explained. "They seemed to be bound on a long journey, and they were packing some provisions along with them. We managed to make them understand that we were starving to death, and they finally loosened up on this bit of bear meat. Stingy beggars!"

"They seemed in a great hurry to get where they were going," Chess added. "I think they were trying to make us understand that there was another big storm threatening."

A few hours later Ruth drew Tom aside and spoke to him in a low tone.

"If that is true about the storm, we had better get away from here, at once, Tom," she said, and Tom nodded soberly.

"I guess you are right. If we stay here we are more than likely to starve to death. We will start first thing in the morning, Ruth—though where we will go I am certain I cannot tell."

In the morning Ruth woke before any one else,

conscious of a horrible feeling of depression. The igloo and the world outside was silent, with an intense, deadly quiet.

She got up and crept to the door of the igloo over which she had carefully fastened the tattered skin on the previous night. She pushed this aside and peered out.

She stumbled backward, gasping, as though some one had struck her a physical blow.

For to her startled gaze had been revealed, not a vista of drifted snow and ice, but a solid, blank white wall. Some of the lighter particles of snow sifted into the igloo as she hastily replaced the flap.

"Snowed under!" she muttered to herself. "And Tom said that we would start the first thing this morning! Not a thing in the place to eat and snowed under!"

CHAPTER XXV

SUCCESS

When full realization of their horrible predicament came to those within the igloo, they set to work like madmen to free themselves from that intolerable prison.

For the time they forgot the bleak barren world without from which they had escaped to the welcome warmth and shelter of the igloo. They remembered only that to stay where they were, hopelessly snowed under, would mean certain death. Outside there was, at least, a chance.

All that day they tunneled desperately, using the old dilapidated cooking utensils for tools, bending them so that they would be usable. When these broke or twisted, they went on digging with their bare hands.

For hours they kept at it, and for hours into the night, working until they fell down exhausted, catching a few moments of sleep and going on again. It was a frenzied scene, but these people were desperate. They must dig out to the outer world or die.

A ray of light through the crust of the snow as they tunneled upward, sent them raving about the place almost like maniacs. Even Ruth yielded to the general hysteria and began to sob softly.

Then the crust was broken, and they clambered through, to lie upon the snow, exhausted, gasping, bloody of hand, and bloodshot of eye, but exultant. They were free—free!

After a while they got up and staggered on, knowing nowhere to go, yet keeping on blindly, a queer, pathetic procession, one to catch at the heart if there had been any in that wilderness to see.

And there was one!

High on the crest of a hill, Anton Delabarre halted his dog team and stared down at the straggling line in the valley below him.

"By gar!" he murmured into his thick beard. "Dose fellows pretty much all in, fo' sure. You go catch 'em, Chio. Quick, lak you know how!"

Ruth, hearing the voice of Delabarre urging on his dogs, thought she must be dreaming. She had heard that starving people often hear strange things and see strange visions.

The next moment she had flung herself forward, sobbing and laughing, into the arms of the gentle Frenchman, who stroked her shoulder awkwardly.

"You all right dis tam, li'l girl," he said.

"You no cry any more. Anton, he tak' good care of you, fo' sure!"

It was Delabarre who took them to his cabin that night, who fed and warmed and comforted them, and finally told them of the vessel anchored in the harbor not many miles away.

"I an' my frien,' Briais, will tak' you dere tomorrow, if you wish," Delabarre told them. "She pick you up an' maybe she have news for you also of your other ship, *Ice Bird*."

The whole party slept like logs that night and in the morning had to be fairly forced awake by Delabarre, who was anxious for an early start.

"Dat ship she leave early, maybe," he explained. "We must get to her queek lak' we can!"

No other threat would have been as effective a spur as that one. The mention of a ship had filled them with an intense homesick longing to start south. It must not sail without them!

It proved to be a long tramp to the vessel, though Delabarre had said it was not far away. But then, the Frenchman's idea of distance would naturally be different from theirs.

They reached the harbor about noon and found to their consternation that the ship was preparing to put off. Even as they watched, they saw

that she was moving slowly, almost imperceptibly out to sea.

They signaled frantically, the men running on ahead.

"It is useless, Ruth," cried Helen. "They will never see us."

"But they have—they have! Look!" cried Ruth, pointing toward the vessel. The doleful wail of a siren proved the truth of her statement. The captain had seen them and was turning back.

"Home!" murmured Ruth unsteadily, beneath her breath. "We are going home!"

The time had come to say good-bye to Delabarre and to his silent friend, Briais. They crowded around the Frenchmen and showered them with eager thanks.

Ruth found her hand in Delabarre's and tried to speak, but could not. Perhaps he knew what she was trying to say, for when she turned away he called after her wistfully,

"You remember your frien' Delabarre sometam, eh?"

"Always!" cried Ruth, and waved her hand to him.

It was several days later before they picked up word of the *Ice Bird,* days filled with great anxiety for Ruth. The message came to them through the air, picked up by the wireless opera-

tor aboard the *Titan,* the ship which had come to their rescue.

The captain of the *Titan* had shown the castaways every courtesy and consideration, and now he ordered the wireless message delivered direct to Ruth.

Helen and Tom were with her, and there was great excitement as she read the message.

The *Ice Bird* was safe! That much they learned at once. Because of the heavy storm it had been unable to get back to harbor, but the captain was anxious about some of his passengers who had been left on shore.

The *Ice Bird,* they gathered from the message, had already turned back, but the captain requested any vessel nearer that particular latitude and longitude than the *Ice Bird* to set back at once to the relief and succor of the castaways.

As soon as she had gathered the gist of the message, Ruth was off like a shot, leaving Helen and Tom to stare after her. She went direct to the wireless room, where she requested that a return message be sent at once to the *Ice Bird.*

In this she reported that she and the other members of the company were safe, and gave as nearly as she knew it, the general course of the *Titan.* Then she asked if her films were safe.

It seemed a long time before the message, repeated every few moments, was picked up—

before the answer came. This is the way the dots and dashes sounded, expertly translated by the wireless operator.

"Noggs and Dawson set *Ice Bird* adrift. Now where they can do no more harm. Overjoyed you are safe. Films O. K.—"

There was more, but Ruth did not wait to hear it.

She came into the cabin where Tom and Helen were awaiting her return and closed the door softly behind her. Her face was white, but her eyes were gleaming.

"Helen—Tom!" she said. "The films are safe!"

A small and attentive group of authors, directors and distributers sat in a darkened room awaiting the release of Ruth Fielding's new picture, "Snowblind."

As the first scenes flashed upon the screen, Helen, seated next to Ruth, pressed her arm and leaned close to her.

"I am crazy to see our Frenchmen again," she whispered. "By the way, Ruthie, Chess's uncle has approved the plan of giving Delabarre and Briais charge of his snowball property. He

thinks Chess is a wonder—and far be it from Chess to contradict him!"

Ruth nodded vaguely, absorbed in the drama as it unfolded upon the screen. It was great—she knew it. Better even than she had hoped. But would these men, gathered here to pass upon her picture, think so too?

It was over. As in a dream Ruth saw the lights flash on, saw Silverman, the man who had made more than one aspiring author—and broken many more—approaching her with hand outstretched.

"Your picture is a knockout, Miss Fielding," he cried enthusiastically. "The only quarrel I have with you is over the name of your picture. It should be 'Spellbound,' for that is what it will do to your audiences!"

Silverman moved away, and Ruth felt a touch on her arm and glanced up to see Tom smiling at her.

"I always said you were a wonder, did I not?" he asked. "Perhaps you will begin to believe me, soon."

"Perhaps I shall," said Ruth, with a laugh. She was too happy to quarrel with any one, then, even on that point!

The next day Ruth and the Camerons started for Cheslow. Ruth was tired and felt she needed a rest. Of course she had already heard from home. Uncle Jabez and Aunt Alvirah were

much improved in health, for which she was thankful.

"I guess I won't want to do another picture for a long, long time," she said dreamily to Tom, while they were speeding onward in a parlor car.

"So you say now, but wait until you've rested for a week or two. Some new idea will pop into your head, and away you'll go, up North, or down South, or out West, or somewhere." Tom shook his head. "No holding you in, Ruth, seems to me. Now, when will you settle down long enough to listen to me?" he added, in a lower tone.

She placed her hand on his and stroked it tenderly.

"Oh, well, that's different," she said slowly. "But—maybe you won't have to wait so very, very long," she added, encouragingly.

THE END

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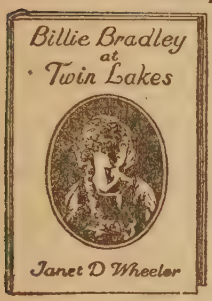

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